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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

Trickster

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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL VOL. 15: TRICKSTER
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story
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translation
Dana Lewis

lettering and retouch
Tomoko Saito

Trickster

DARK HORSE MANGA™

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Swastika

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the swastika was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The arms of the *swastika*, which point in a clockwise direction, are generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. It is important that readers understand that the swastika has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century [ca. 1782–3]. *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

The Artwork

The creator of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Normally, Westernized manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and re-pasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used.

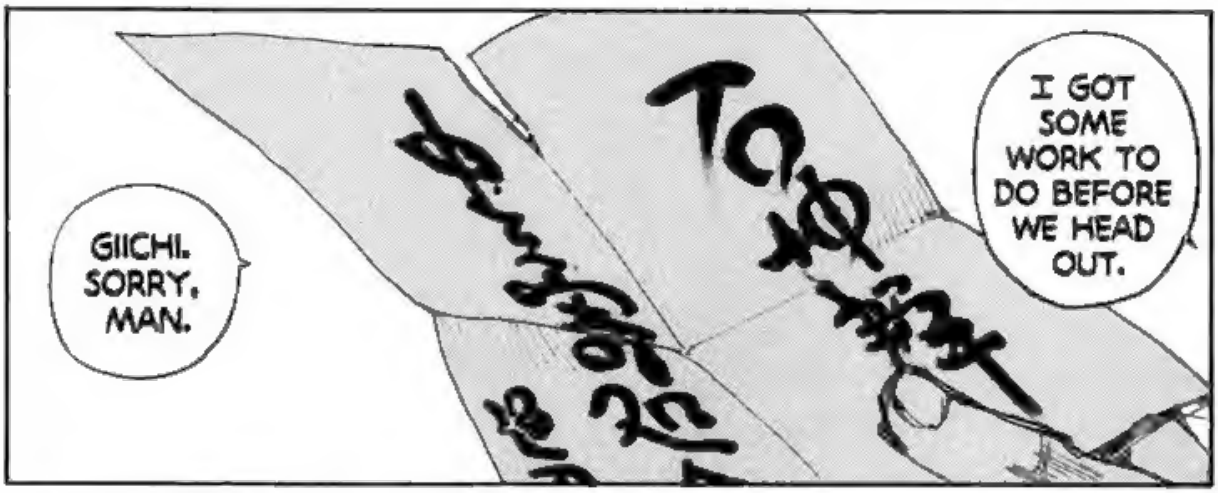
The Sound Effects & Dialogue

Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the illustrations, we decided to leave those in their original Japanese. We hope readers will view the unretouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in typical samurai manga and is considered to be one of the features that has made *Blade* such a hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, with some characters speaking in the mannered style of old Japan while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

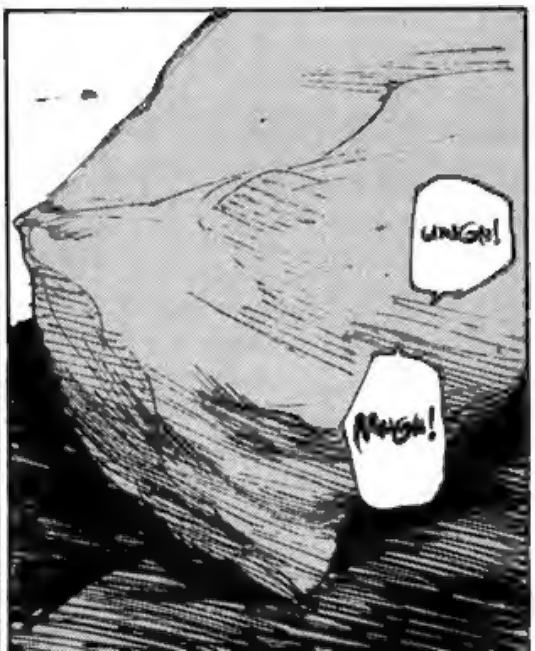
TRICKSTER
Part 1

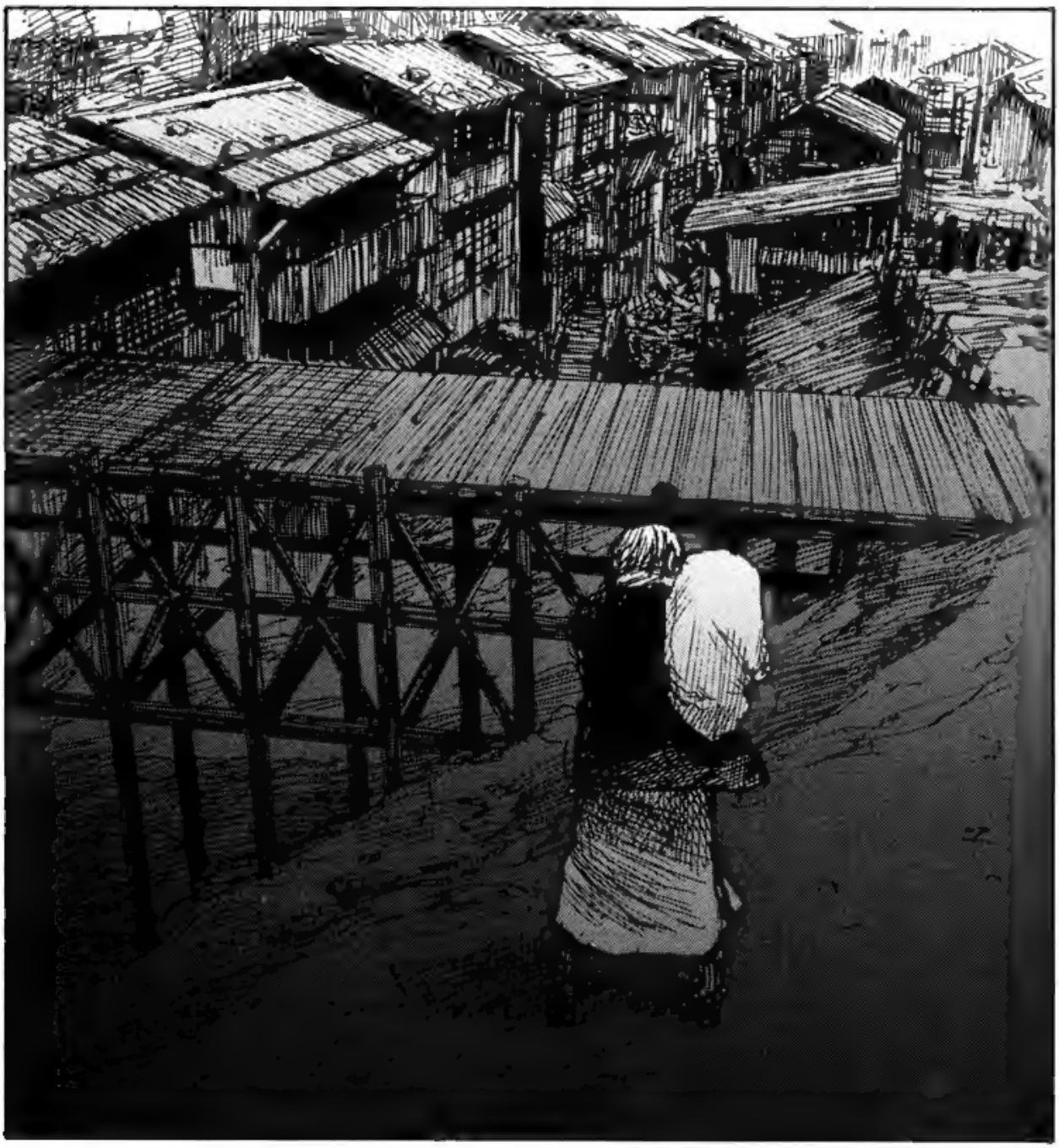
"COME TO THE CENTRAL
BREAK STATION IN
ISHIOSHIGUN QUARRY.
-ITTŌ-RYŪ"

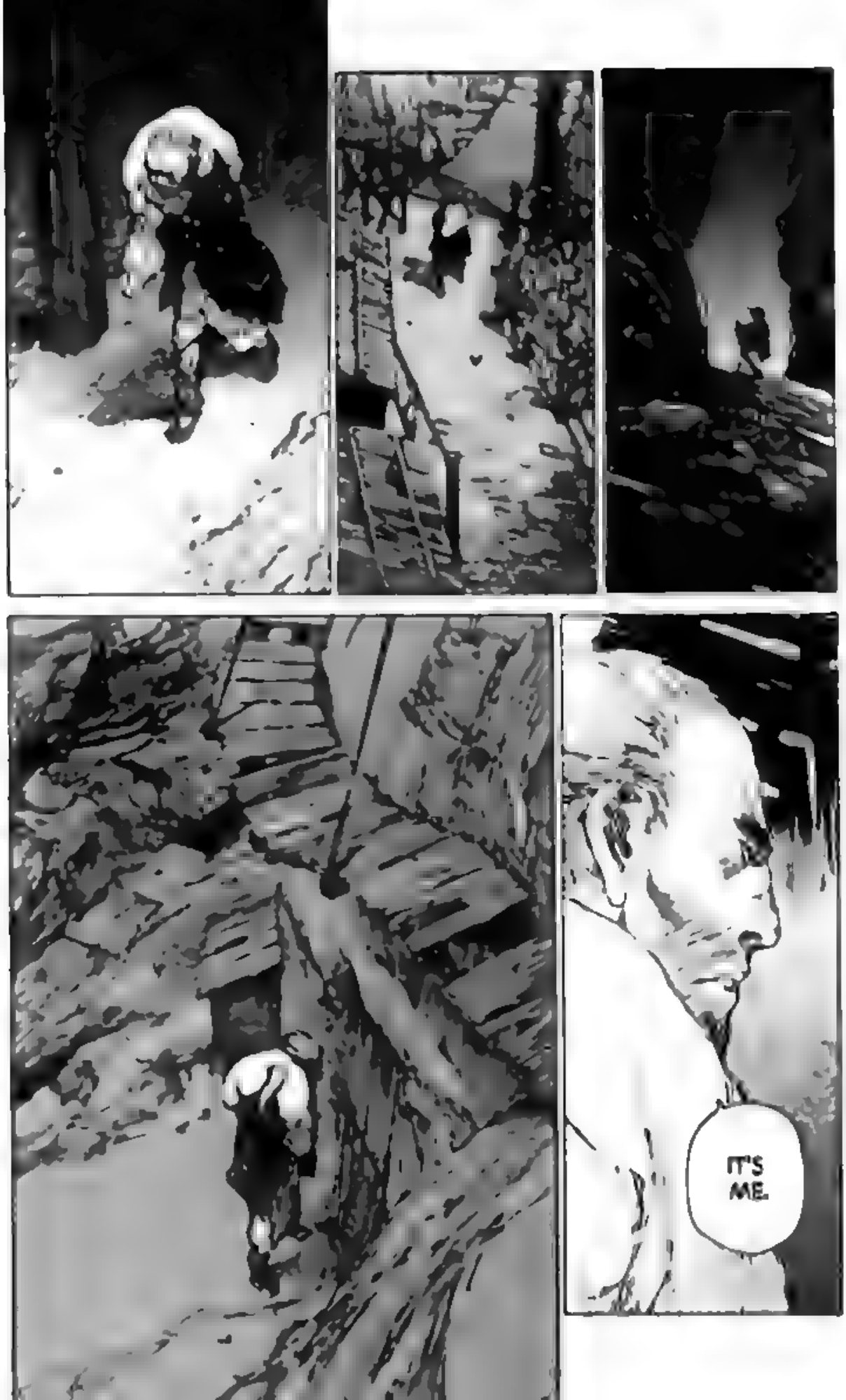
?!
WHAT IS IT...?


I GOT SOME WORK TO DO BEFORE WE HEAD OUT.
GIICHI. SORRY, MAN.

...SO BE IT.
I'LL JOIN YOU.


UNGH!
NNGH!




IT'S ME.

OWW!
AH...?
YOU...?

I'LL SAY THIS FIRST.
WE'RE NOT AFTER YOU.
BEHAVE, AND YOU'LL BE UNHARMED.
OUR BUSI-NESS...
...IS WITH YOUR MAN.
RIN.
WE'RE FIGHTING AN ENEMY LIKE NONE WE'VE EVER KNOWN.

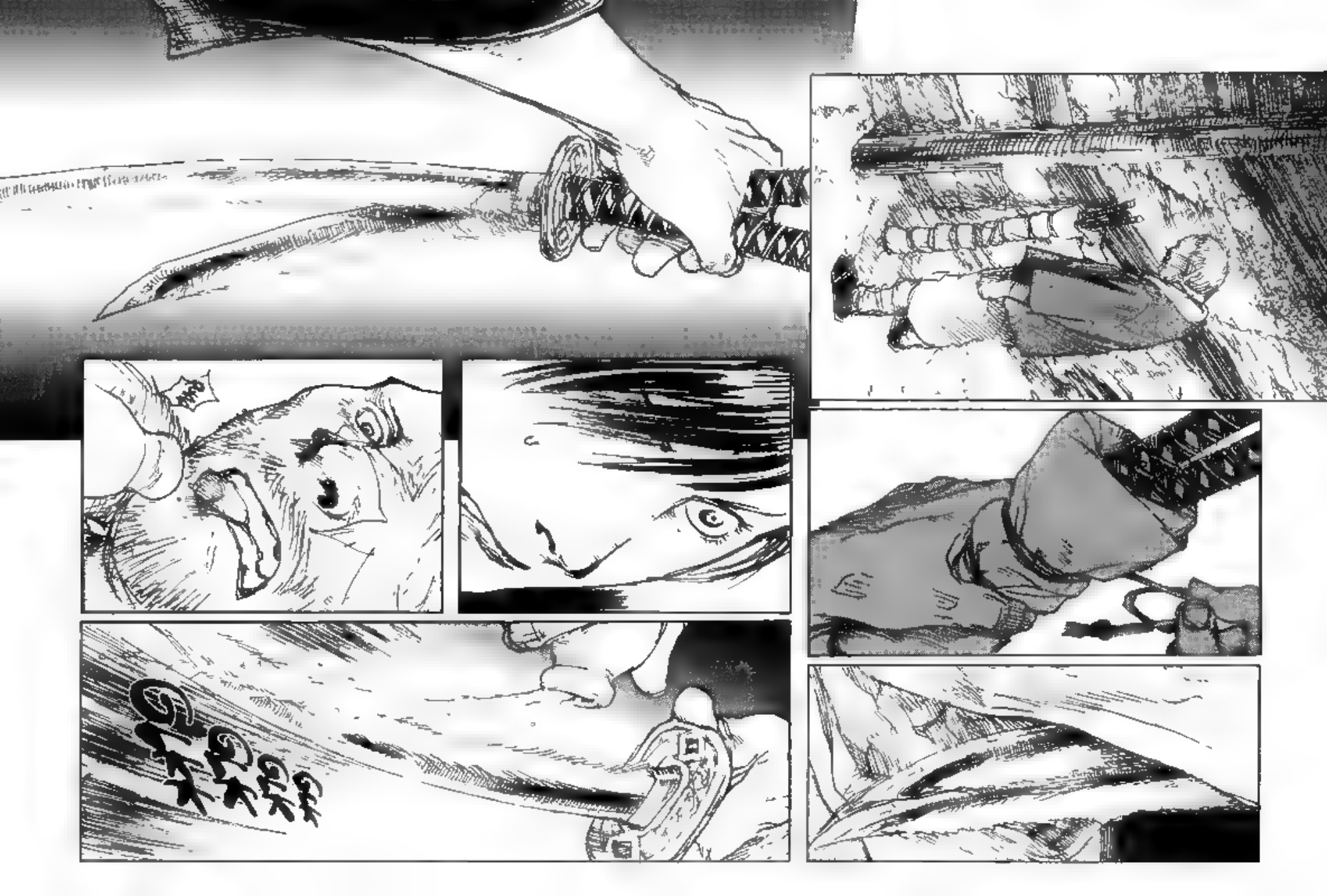
INCREDIBLY POWERFUL.
DEPENDING ON THE OUTCOME, ITTŌ-RYŪ COULD BE HISTORY.
HOW'S THAT, HUH? YOUR HATED ITTŌ-RYŪ...
...ON THE ROPES IN JUST ONE MONTH.
SO, REALLY...
...WE SHOULDN'T BE WASTING TIME MESSING AROUND WITH MANJI NOW. BUT FOR US, HOW DO I PUT THIS...
IT'S ABOUT...
... CLOSURE.

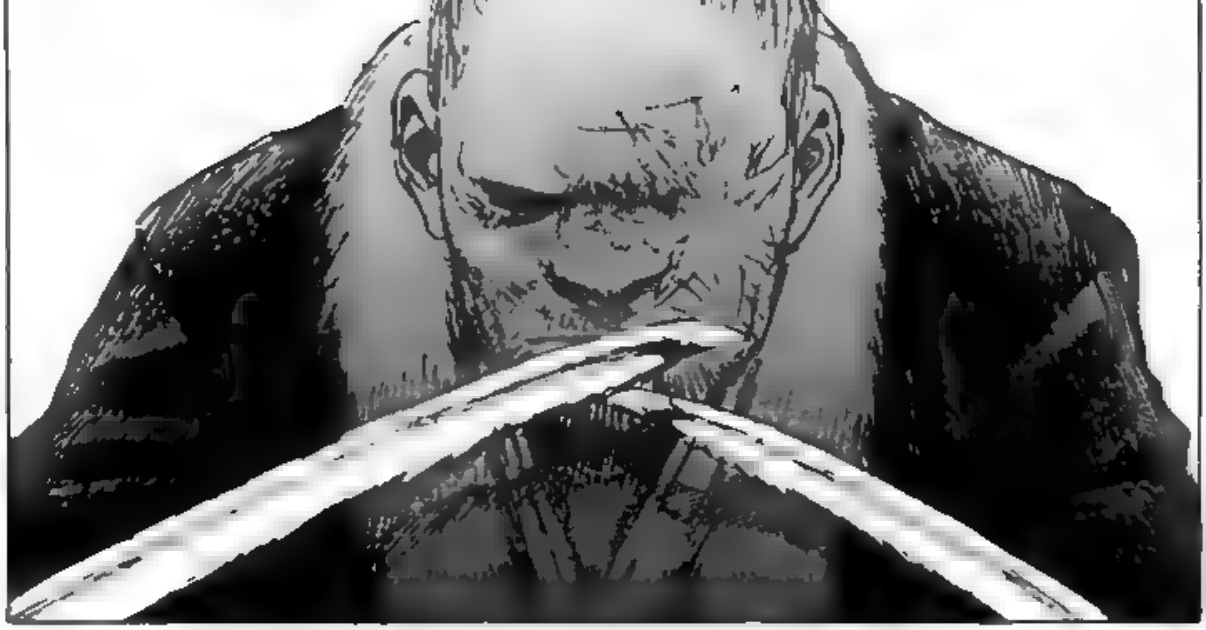
WITH HIM FOR A BODYGUARD, YOU'VE KILLED TWENTY OF OUR GUYS.
I'M NOT GOING THERE. NOT NOW. I REMEMBER WHAT WE DID TO YOU TWO YEARS AGO...
...BUT MANJI? IT'S A DIFFERENT STORY.
THE BASTARD WASTED SO MANY OF OUR FRIENDS. WE GOTTA GET CLEAR.
OR SO SAY...
...THE TWO GENTS OVER THERE.

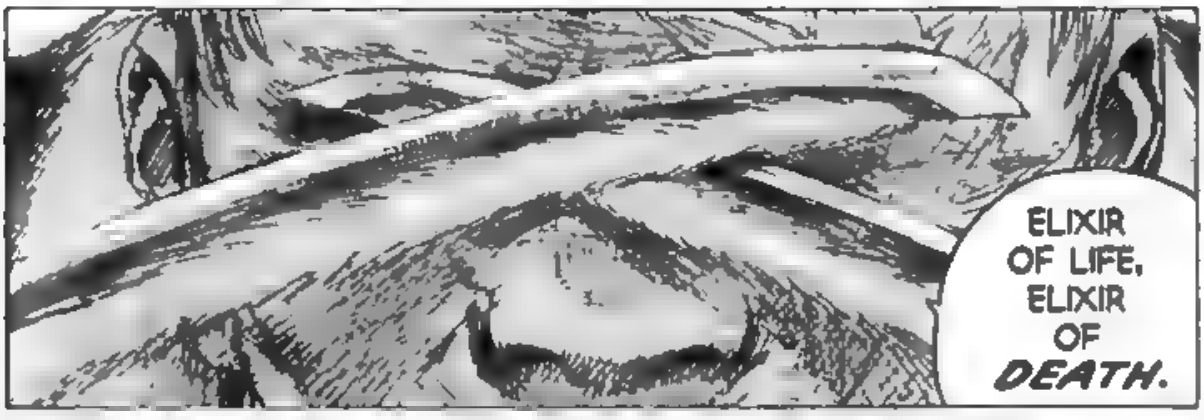
KNOW WHAT THIS SUCKER IS?
...?
THIS LITTLE TOY?
IT'S A KINDA' POISON. FROM ONE O' THE GUYS YOU KILLED.
HE CALLED IT... KESSEN-SATSU.

!!
THAT--!
THAT CAN'T--!
.....
.....
.....
THERE WAS ONE O' THEM MONSTERS IN THE ITTO-RYU...?
FREAKIN' BLOWS MY MIND...
I'LL BE DAMN-ED...
GUESS IT'S FOR REAL... I DON'T BELIEVE...

I DUG IT OUT OF EIKŪ SHIZUMA'S OLD CRAP. REST HIS FREAKIN' SOUL.
GUESS YOU WON'T MIND IF WE USE IT.
WE'VE DILUTED IT A WEE BIT.
DON'T KNOW HOW POTENT IT IS, SEE? NOT MUCH FUN IF HE CROAKS ON THE FIRST CUT.
DON'T RESENT US, RIN. WE'RE NOT PLAYING DIRTY.
PLAYING DIRTY IS NOT DYING WHEN YOU'VE BEEN HACKED.






ELIXIR OF LIFE, ELIXIR OF DEATH.

HAW HAW HAW HAW!

SHIT!
WHAT'S WITH THIS RAGGEDY-ASS DUMP?
I DON'T GOT TIME, MAGATSU. ALL OF YOU TOGETHER!
SURE. IN A BIT...
DAMN.

EH?! WHO'S THAT BEHIND YOU?
AH?! NAW, HE'S--
ANOTHER LITTLE HELPER?
GETTING SOFT, AREN'T YOU?
THAT MAN...

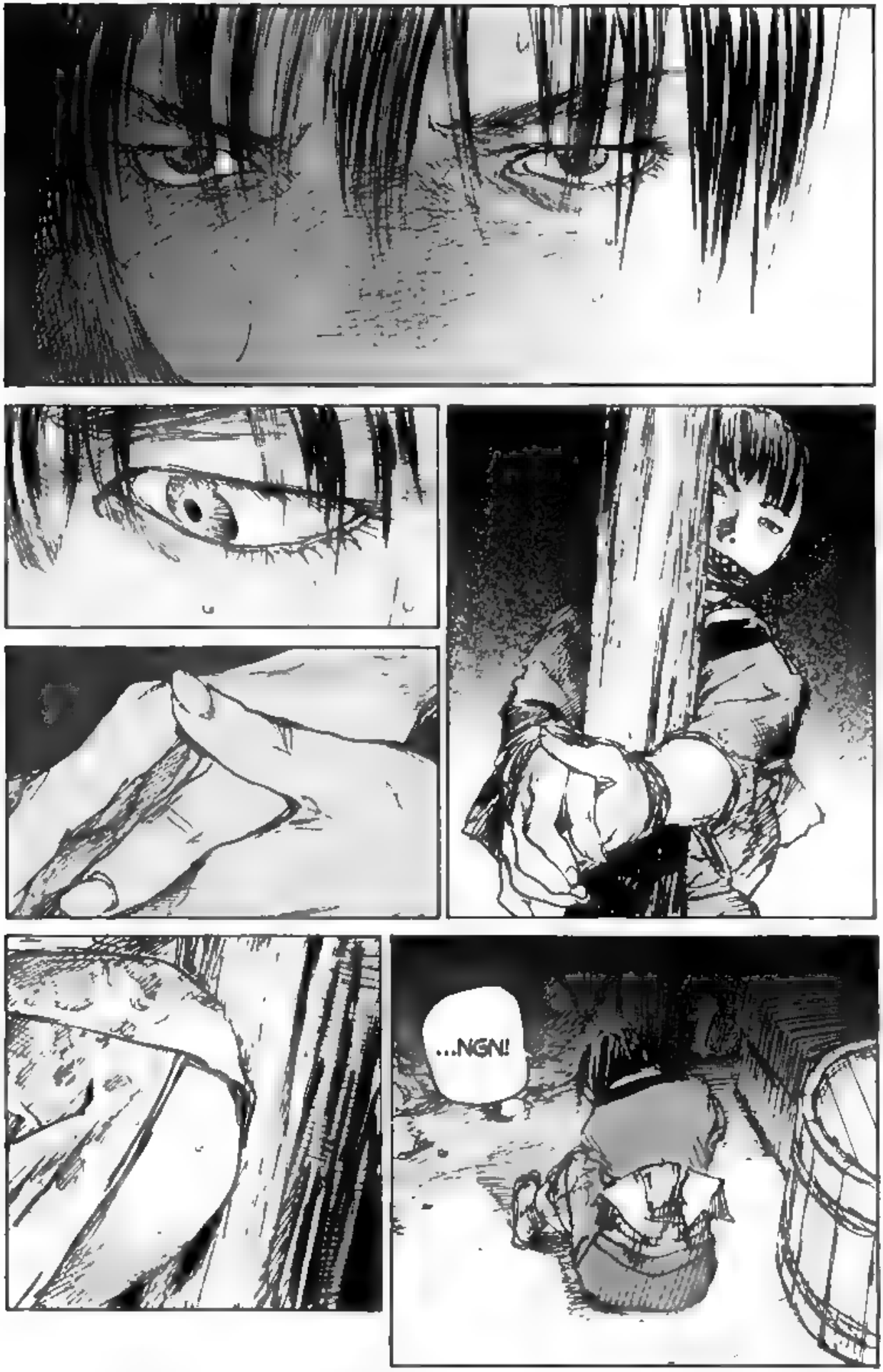
YOU!
AREN'T YOU...
HABAKI KAGI-MURA'S--!!
FUCK!!
INDEED.
MY MASTER IS THE BANGASHIRA.
HABAKI KAGIMURA.

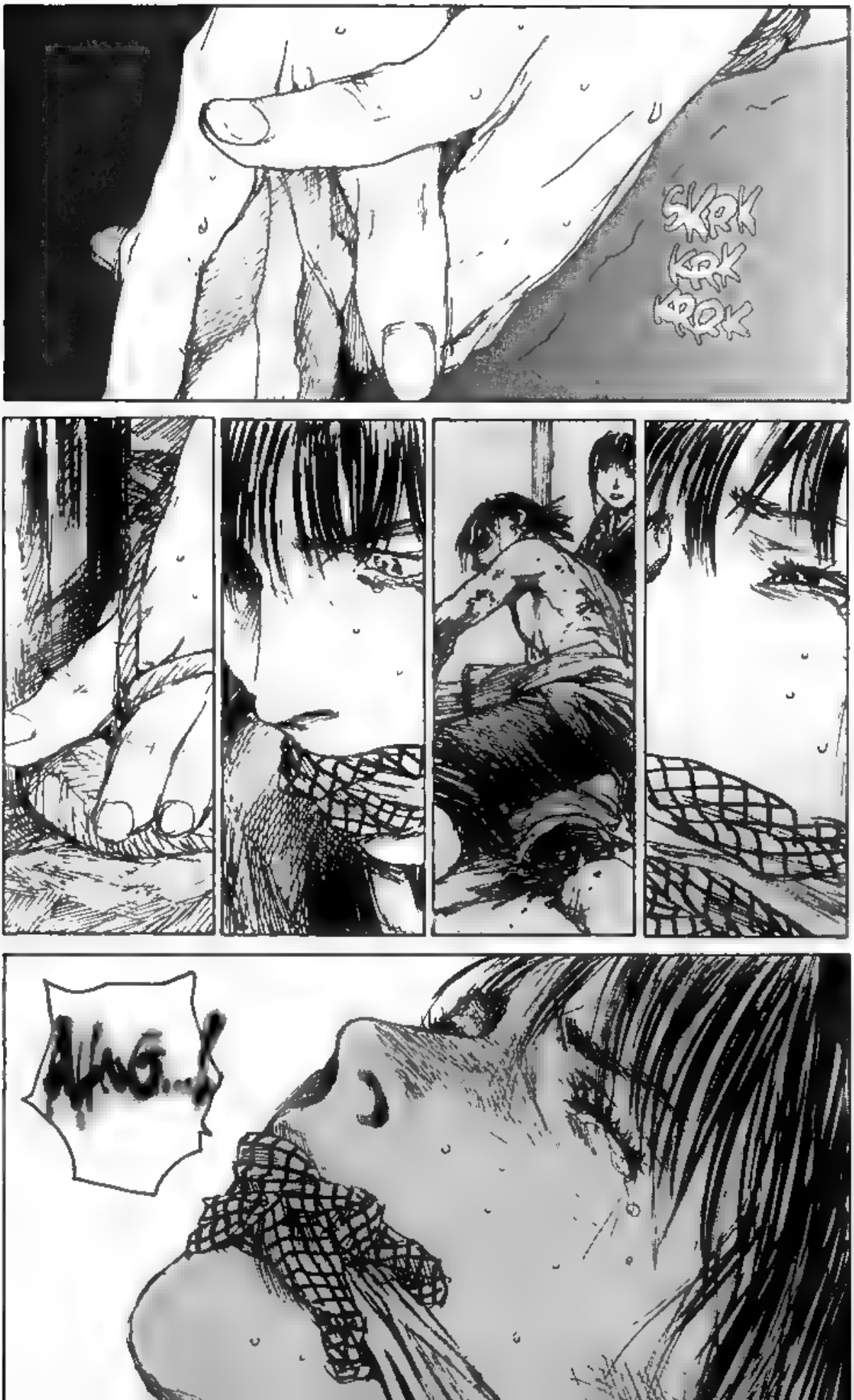
...YOU...
IT WAS YOU...!

GREAT.
I DRAGGED ALONG A RIPE ONE.
I'M NOT A HELPER.
YOU INTER-RUPTED OUR TALK.
HOWEVER, IF YOU HAVE BUSINESS...
...I'M WILLING TO OBLIGE.
.....
.....
.....

UHF...
KWA...
RIN! LISTEN... IF I DIE... DON'T...
...DON'T GO AFTER ANOTSU ALONE! FIND ANOTHER--
SHUT UP!
I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT! I WON'T!

MANJI-- TAKE THESE.
UNGG...
shaff
HAFF...
THEY'RE PILLS ROLLED FROM DOSEI-MOTSUKŌ AND RENGYŌ.
IT'S AN ANTI-DOTE I LEARNED ABOUT FROM MY MOTHER.
...UNG


...NGN!

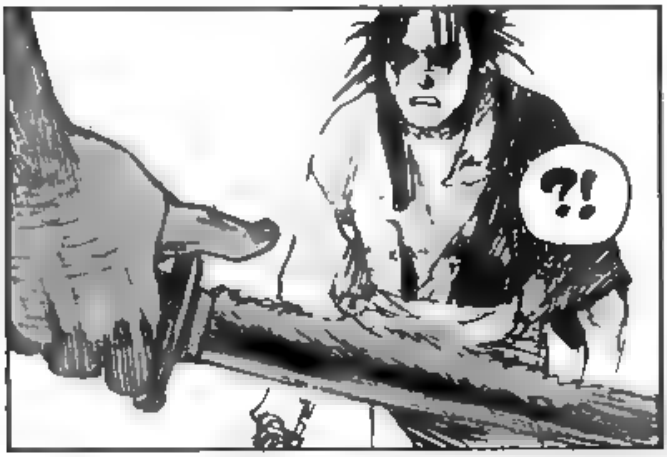

SKRK
KRK
KRK
AHG...!

GRAKK
MANJI. I'LL SAY IT ONCE.
HAHN?
WHEN WE FOUGHT BEFORE, WITH MY SCYTHE STUCK AROUND YOUR NECK...
...YOU USED FISTS, NOT A BLADE.

...DON'T THINK YOU CAN SURVIVE THAT WAY HERE.
IF THAT WAS BECAUSE I WAS UNARMED...
ARMED, UN-ARMED? SCREW ALL THAT.

IT WAS BECAUSE YOU WANTED TO TAKE ME IN.
IF WE WERE FIGHTING TO THE DEATH, MAN...

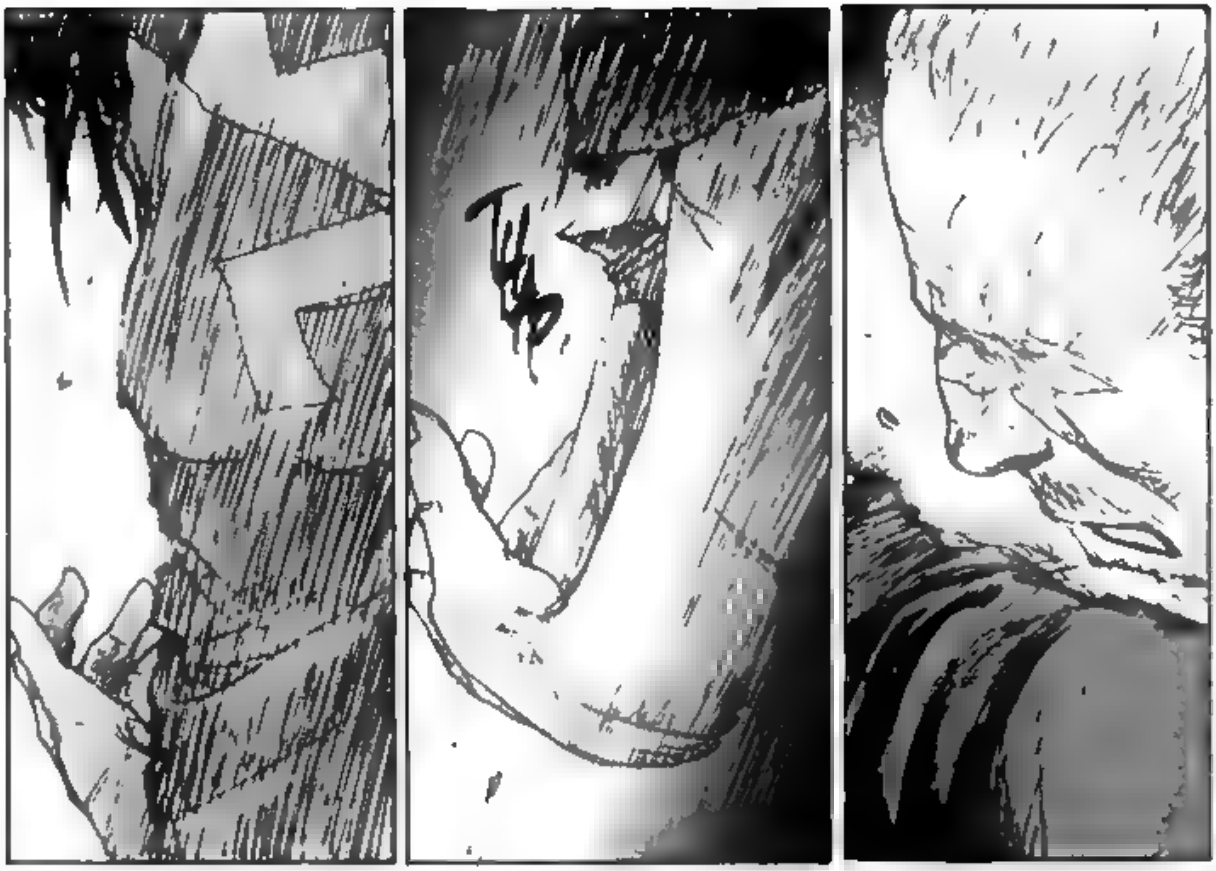
HMF. I'LL JUST SHOW YOU HOW IT'D BE.


?!

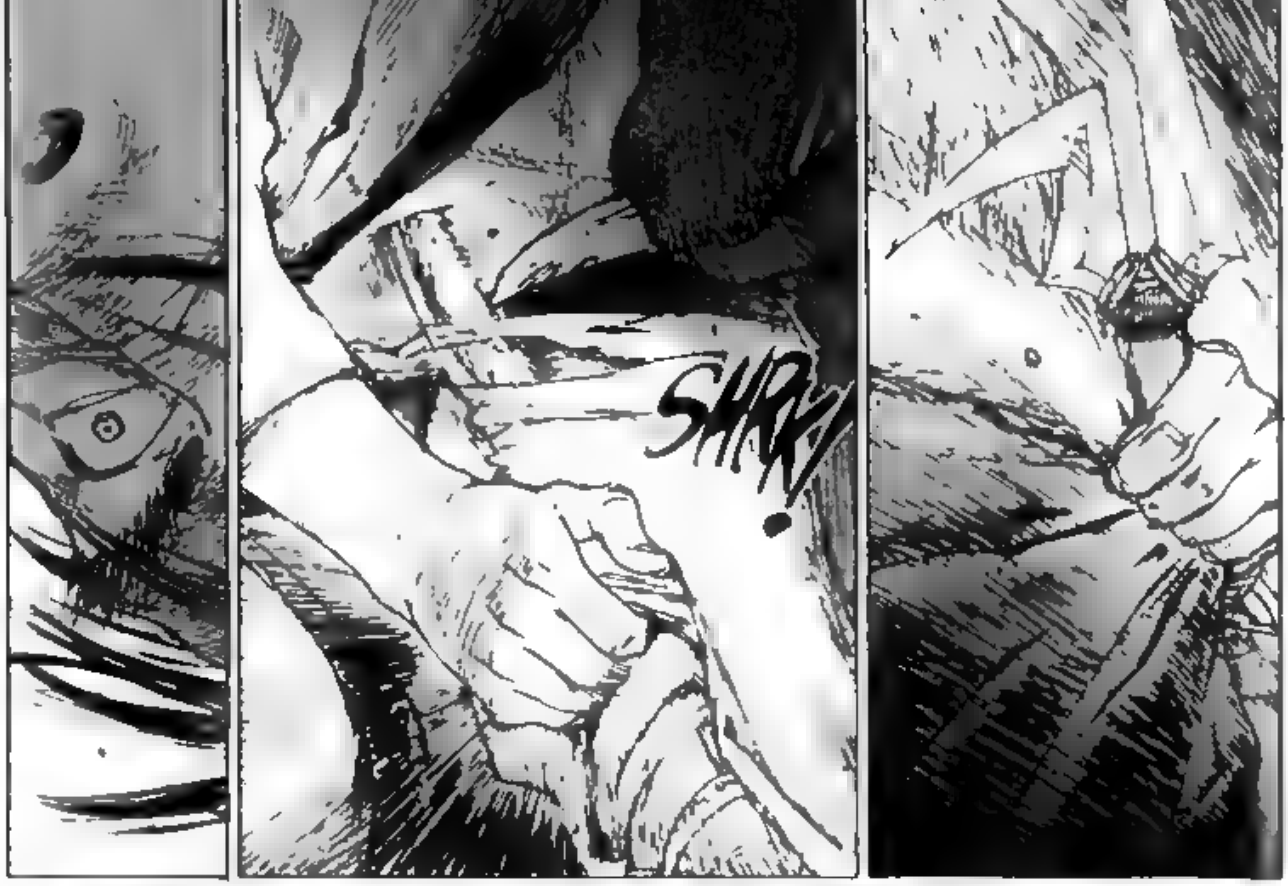
THAT SWORD...

WAYAN KURISHIGE. ITTŌ-RYŪ. I WILL FIGHT YOU...
...THE "ONE-HUNDRED-MAN MURDERER."

SKSH!


Tuk

BRRRP
?!
CHUK

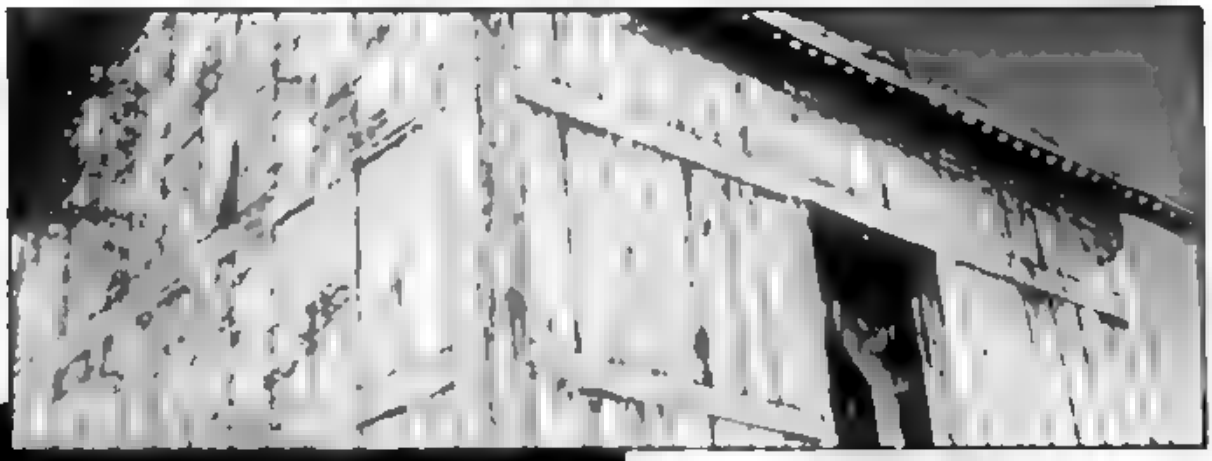

SHRK!

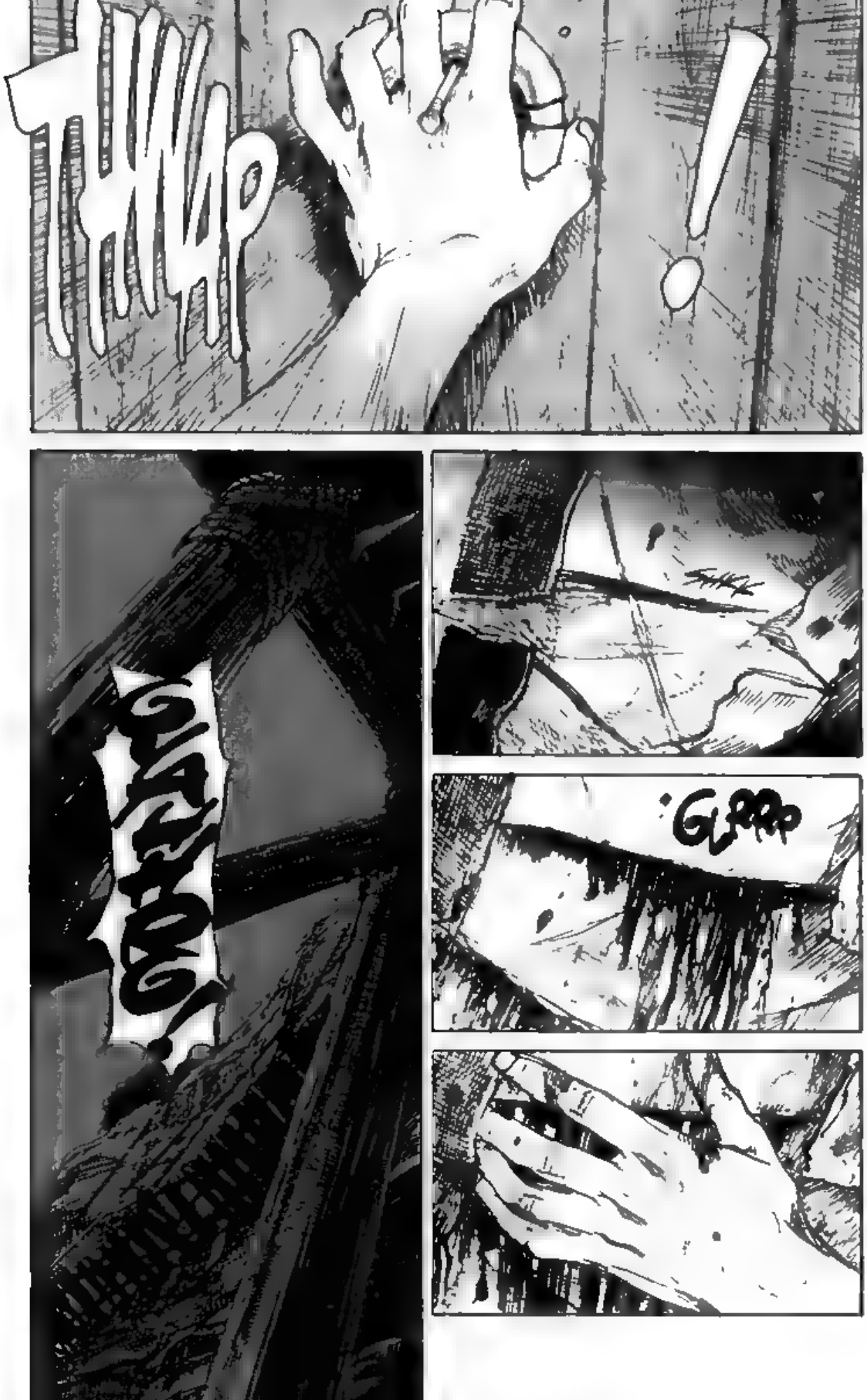
GRR YAAAH!

FFNK!

?!
HRRK...
FUOH!!

TRICKSTER
Part 2




THUMP!
SLICE!
GURRP

GHIF...

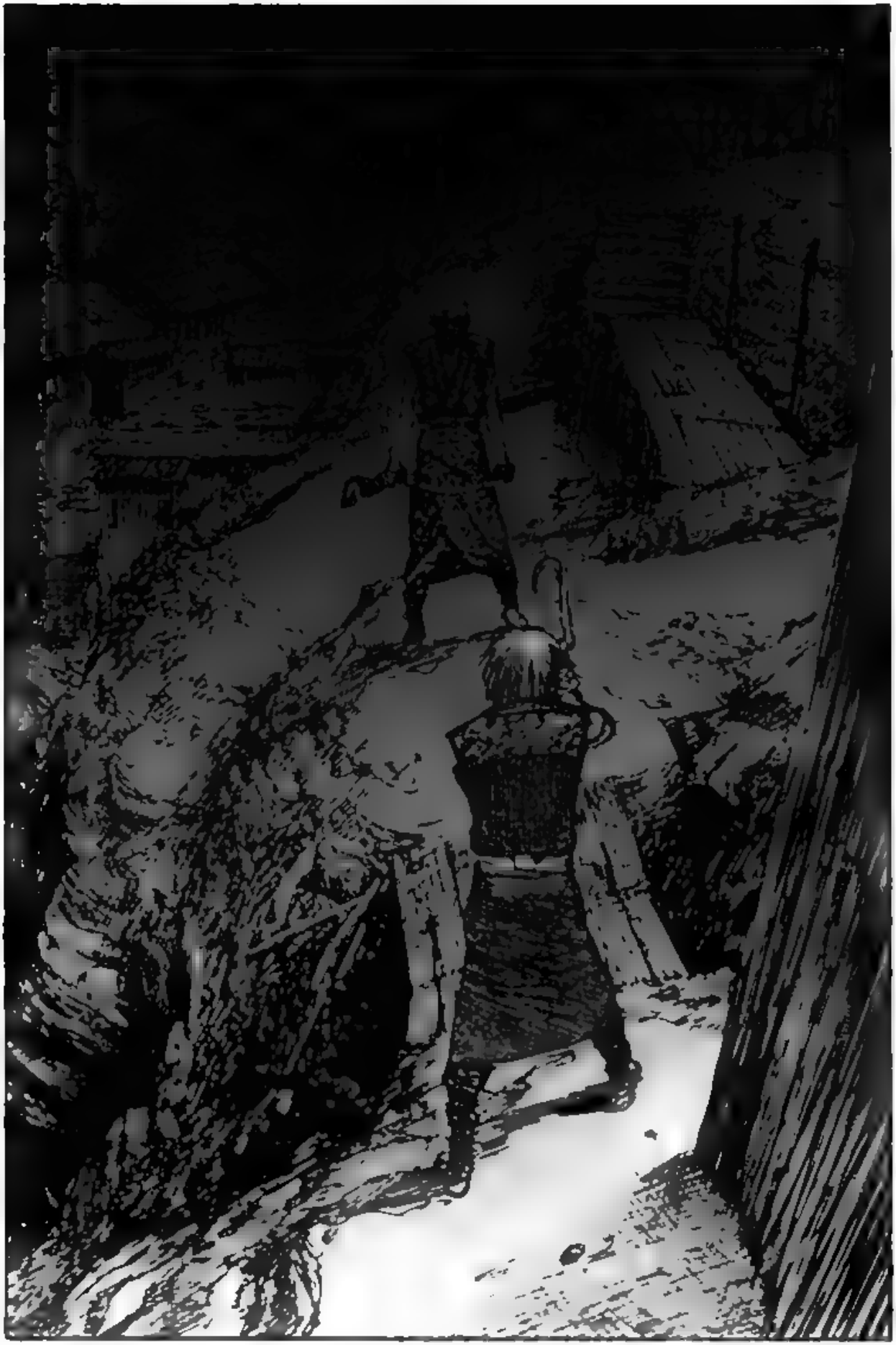
THIS IS TOO... FUCKED UP...
TEARING OPEN... NEWEST ONES FIRST...
DAMN YOU, GIICHI...
GOD DAMN YOU...
WELL... NOT HIS FAULT...

ALL THAT? FROM ONE STROKE...?
IT'S... HORREN-DOUS...
UNGAINLY BLADE...
WITHOUT POISON, GOOD FOR NO-THING!
THIS! FOR A WOUNDED BEAST.

SSST!
!
URNE..?
KO

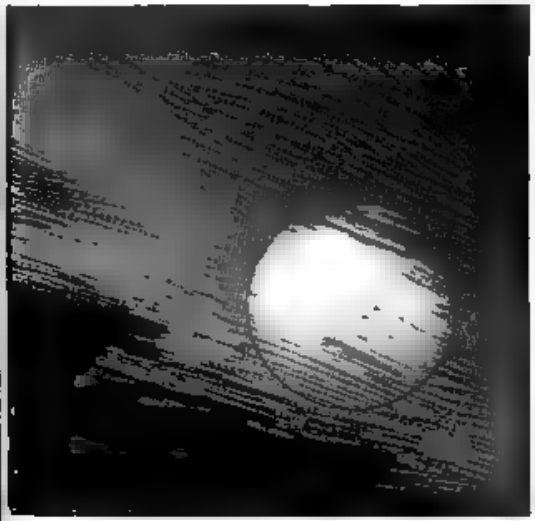
SHIT!
CAN'T GET A FRIGGIN' HIT...
TIPTOEING AROUND A GUY WHO CAN'T SEE?
YOU'RE CAREFUL, I'LL GIVE YOU THAT.

SO LISTEN UP, ITTŌ-RYŪ!
THAT MUCH JUICE WON'T KILL ME.
I KNOW MY OWN CARCASS, SEE?
SO I'M LIKE THIS FOR... HALF AN HOUR? THEN MY BODY'S BACK...
HACK ME TO PIECES FIRST...
...AND YOU WIN.
WAIT TOO LONG?
AND TRY YOUR DAMNEDEST, YOU'RE GONNA DIE!



OF THE ITTŌ-RYŪ WHO SAW YOUR FACE...
...TWO CAME BACK ALIVE.

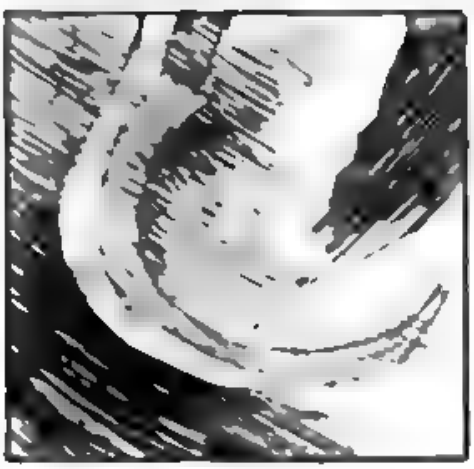
YOU SOME SORTA RE-TARD...?
OR JUST FUCKIN' CON-FIDENT?



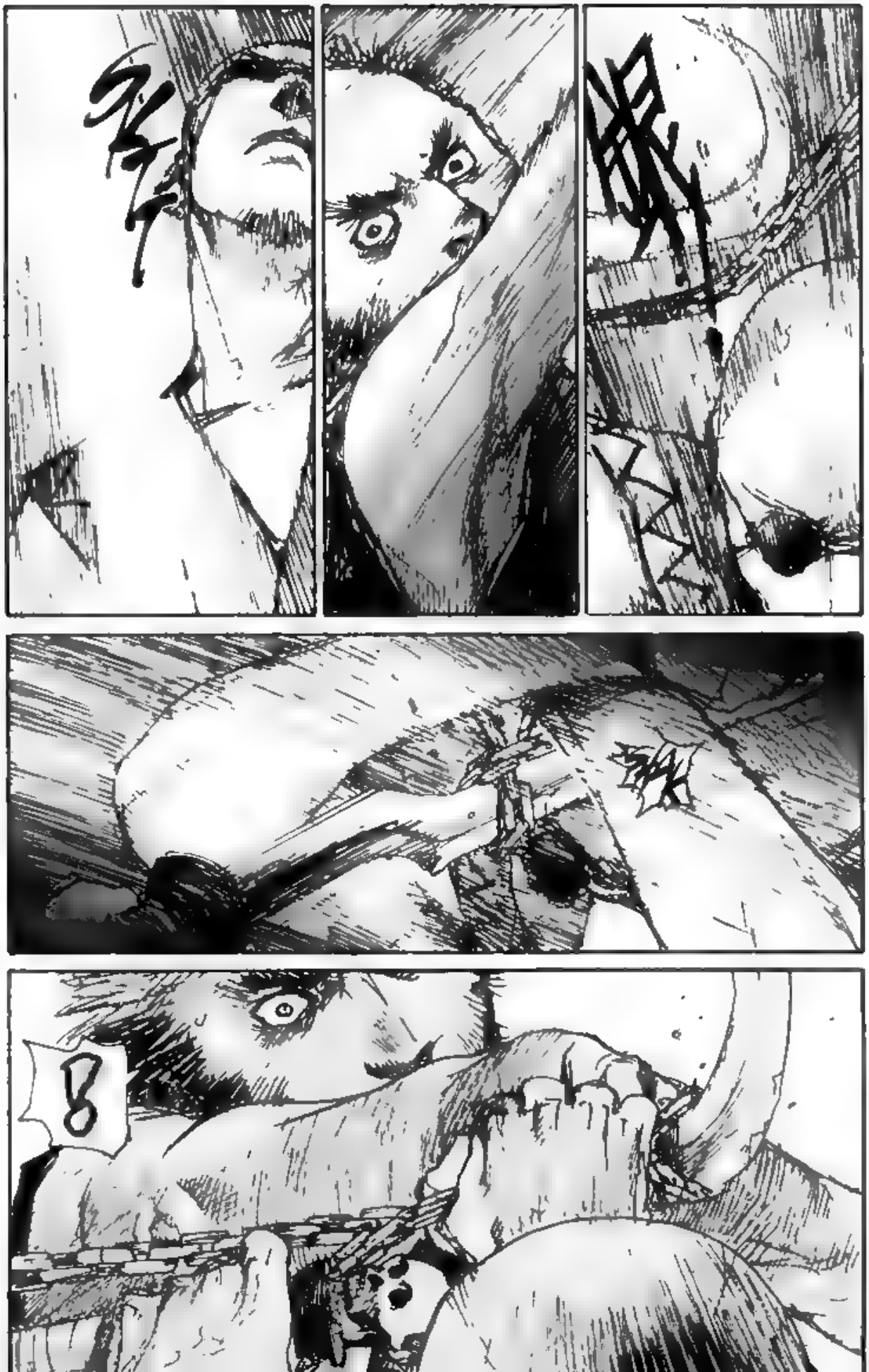
SHUNG!
THUD
CLANG!

!!

Thp



FWM!


8

GRRG...
AUGH...!

THIS IS THE END.
YOU CAN'T FIGHT WITH CUT SWORD-ARM MUSCLES.

.....
.....
.....

?!
SHUSH

KASORI FUJIAKI...
REMEM-BER IT...
THE LAST ITTŌ-RYŪ YOU'LL EVER FIGHT!!

TRICKSTER
Part 3

NOOOO!
NOOO!
SHRRRK

?!
MOTHER--!
CHNG!

:Hack:
GRRRH...
!!

CHKSHEKCHKK

FU...
FUCKAAH...
!!

SHIT!!
SHIT!

DIE!
DIE!

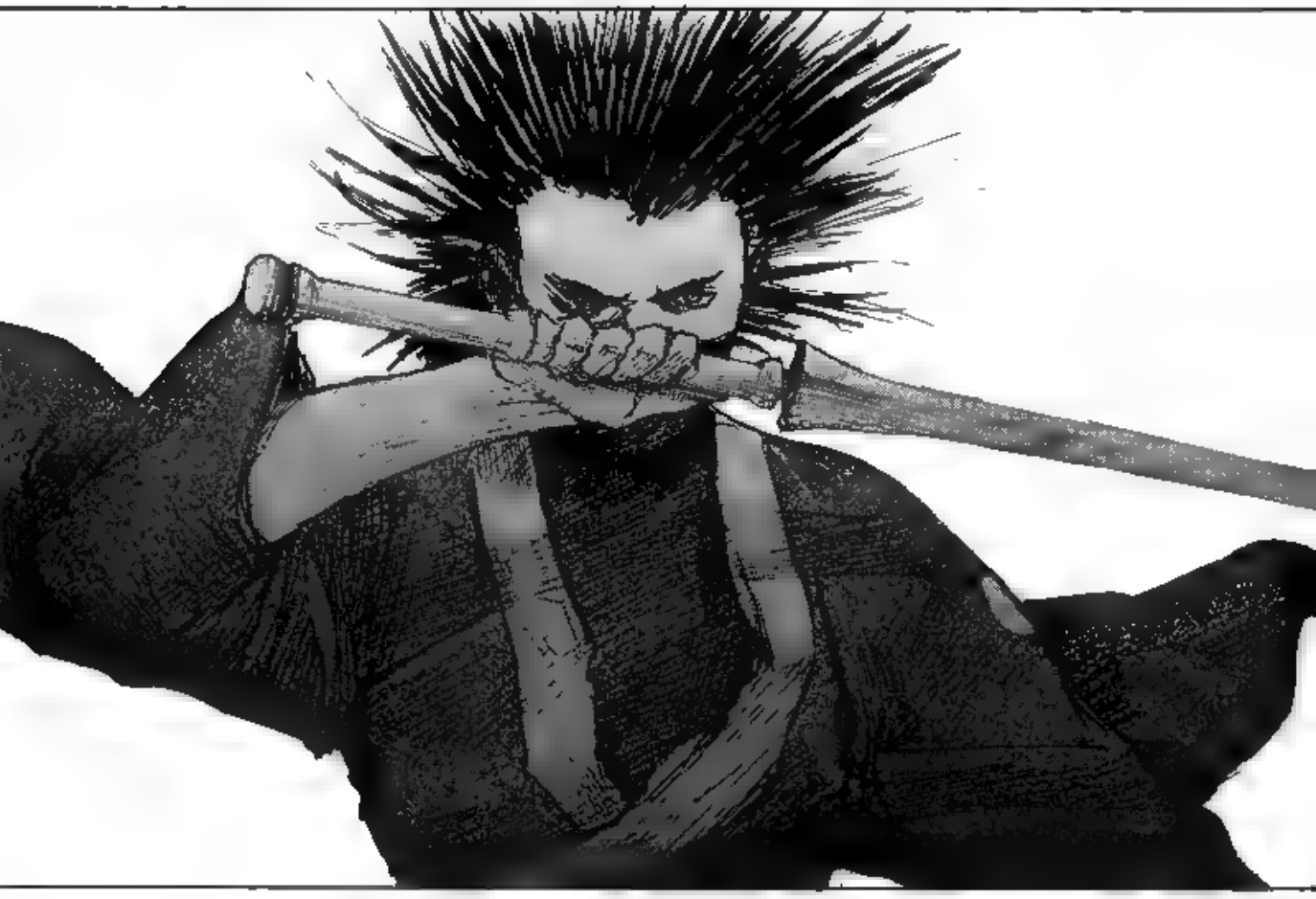
DIEEE
!!

HE'S DEAD.

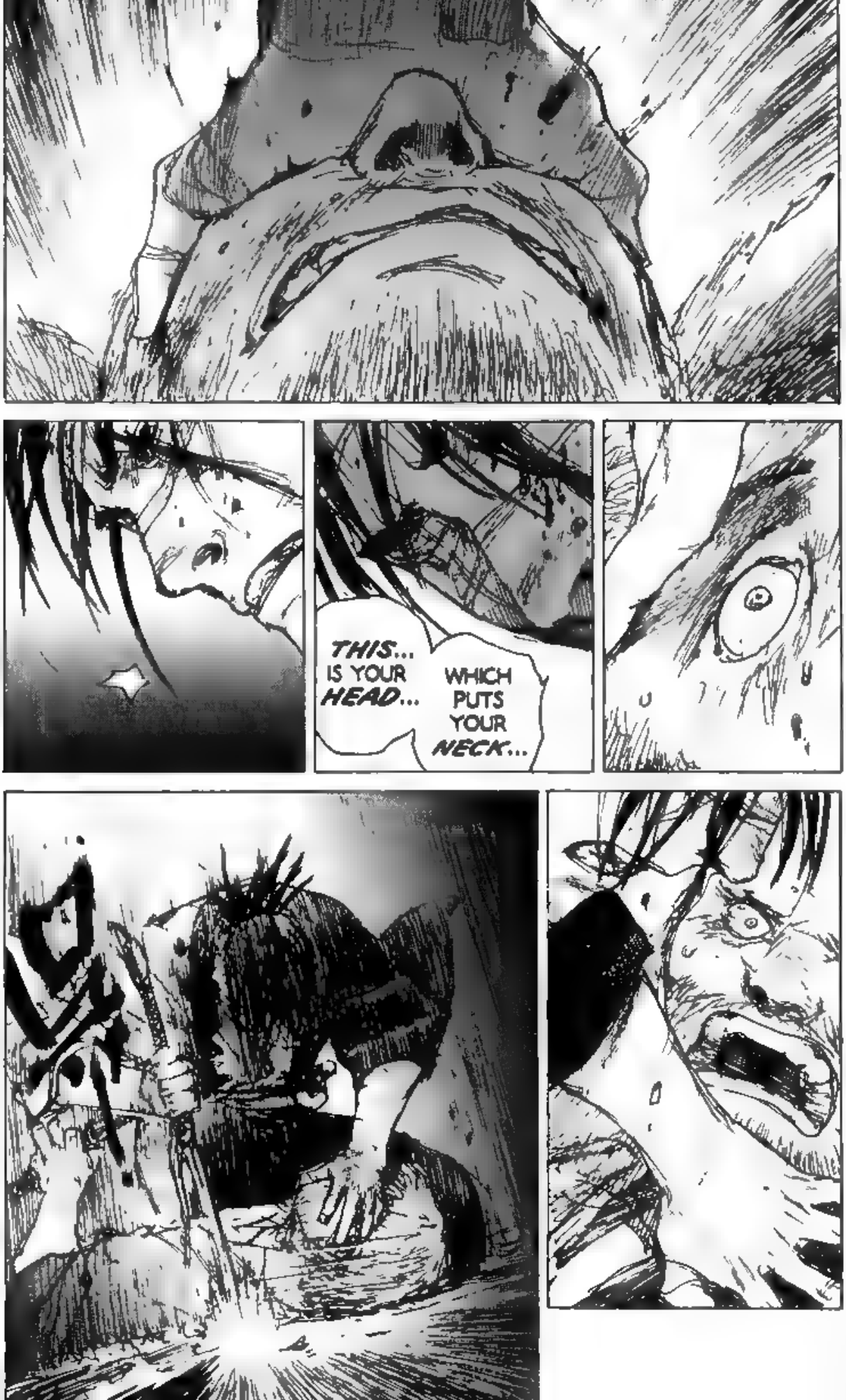
HE WAS A STRONG MAN.
BUT ONE WHO PANICS AT DEATH CANNOT ESCAPE IT.
WHAT WILL *YOU* DO?
NOTHING MUCH.
KILL THE GUY WHO DID MY *CREW*...?
I'M NOT INTO THAT.

WE BANDED TOGETHER TO KILL, OR BE KILLED.
"HUH. SO HE LOST?" THAT'S ALL I FEEL.
... I SEE.
THEN I'LL TAKE MY LEA--
WHAT I CAN'T FOR-GIVE...
...IS WHEN THE KILLER'S A GOVERNMENT DOG!
LIKE, FOR INSTANCE, YOU!!

YOU SAY WE BETRAYED THE ITTŌ-RYŪ?
'CUZ YOU WERE NEVER OUR ALLIES!
BETRAY-ED? WE WEREN'T BETRAYED.
YOU FOUND A WAY TO TAKE OUT AS MANY CRAZY FUCKS AS QUICKLY...
...AS PAIN-LESSLY, AS POSSIBLE! AND THE CRAZY FUCKS WALKED RIGHT INTO IT.
I'M KILLING YOU...
...FOR PETTY, PRIVATE REASONS. HOPE THAT'S OKAY.
...NO CHOICE.

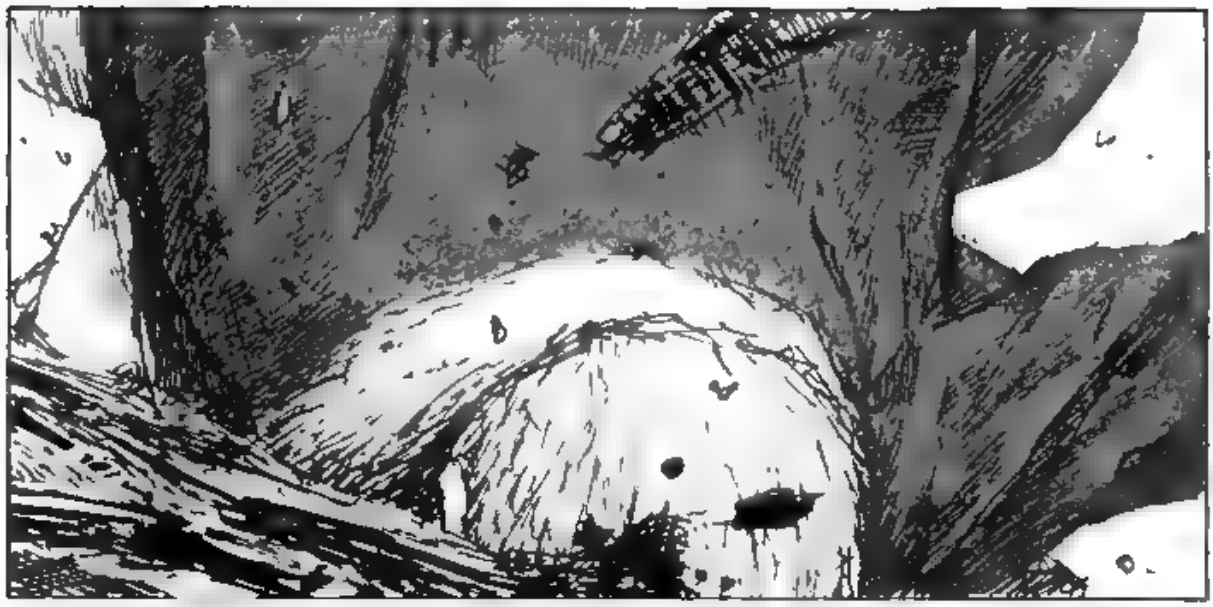


SWOOSH!
GOTCHA!
RIGHT, GEEZER ?!


THIS... IS YOUR HEAD...
WHICH PUTS YOUR NECK...

AUU...!
LET GO !!
CHOMP
CHRK
DAM-MIT...
.....
.....

KRAKK!



HAAH!
uhf...
huf...
ahff...

HAFF
HAFF

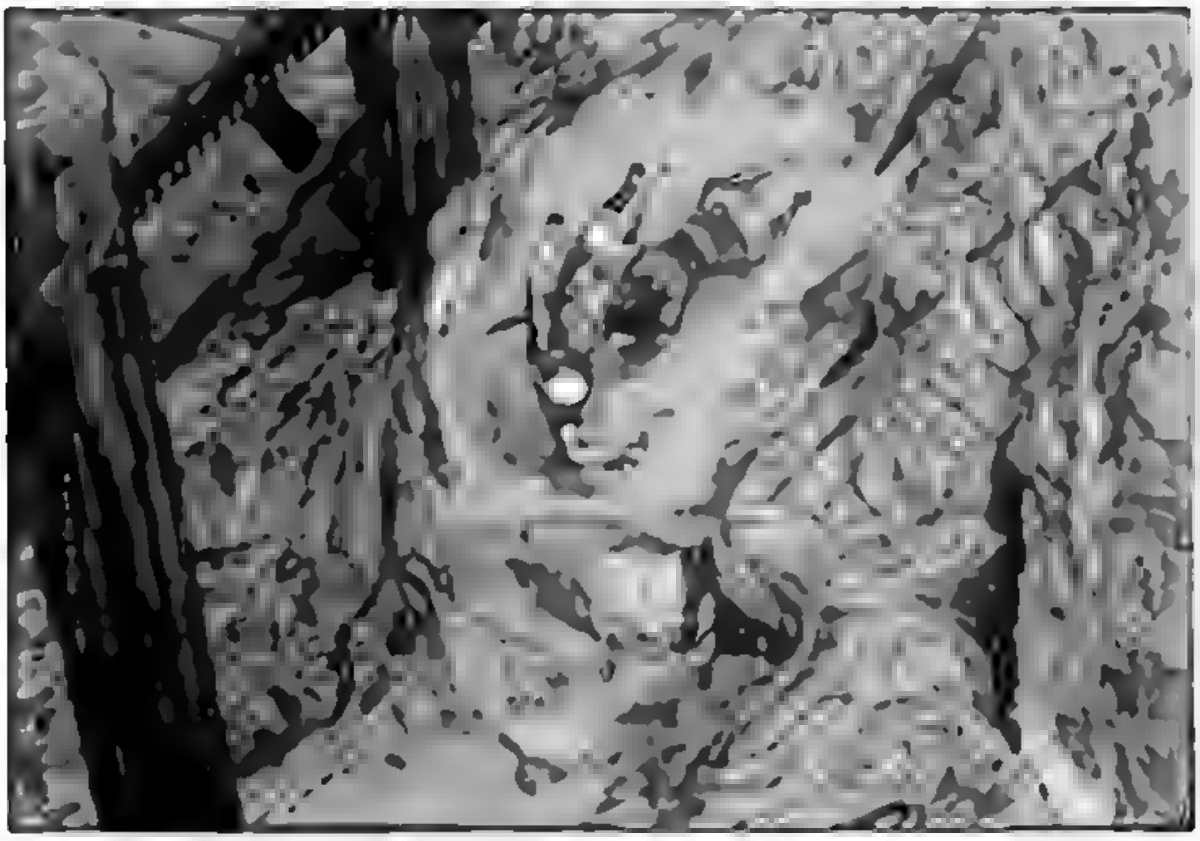
HUNGH...
GOTTA... HANG TOUGH...
FIFTEEN... MINUTES...
FIF-TEEN...
FIFTEEN FREAK-IN'...
JUST... FIF-TEEN...
TOOTH...?
FIFTEEN MINUTES?
NO PROOF, NONE...

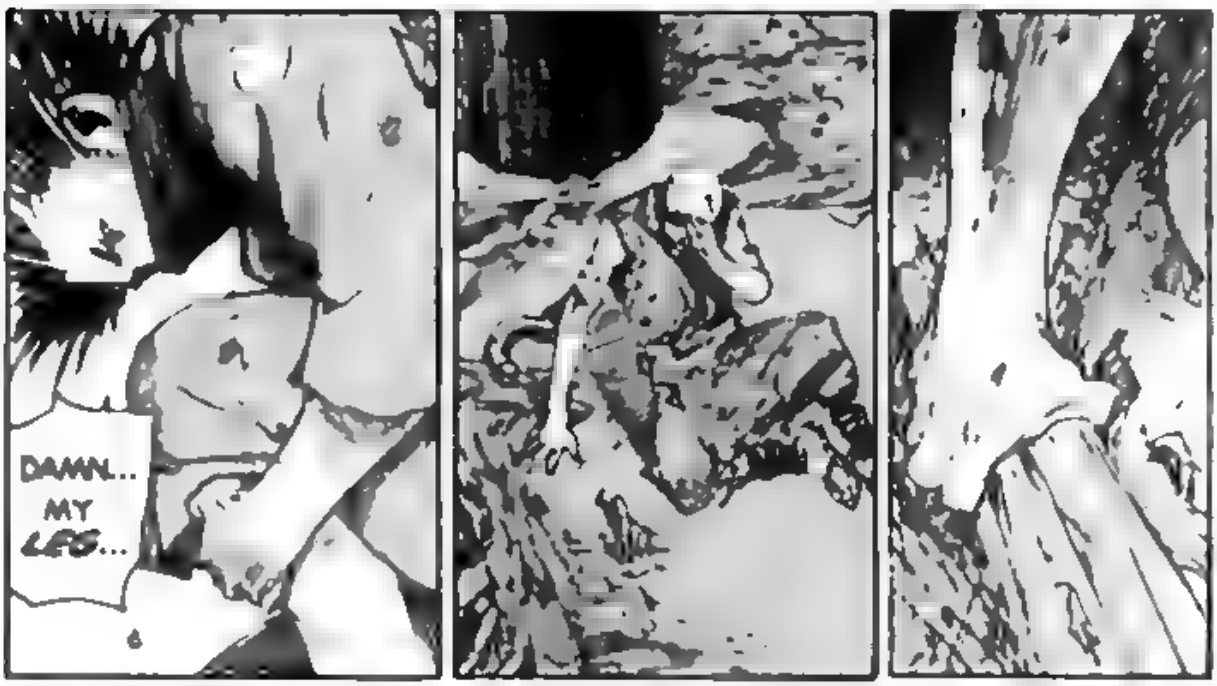
FLEE SIGHTLESS? FOR FIFTEEN MINUTES? A MIRACLE...
NO... WITH ALL THAT BLOOD LOSS, EVEN SOONER...
EVERY TIME. HE LET ME CUT HIM TO GRAB MY SLEEVE...
MAYBE NO CHOICE, NOT WITH HIS EYES GONE.
BUT...THAT INSANE FURY. LIKE...HE FORGETS HE'S FLESH.
IN TRUTH, MY BLOOD RUNS COLD.

HEY!! ITTŌ-RYŪ!
COME AN' FRIGGIN' GET ME! COWARD!!
I SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT MY BOW.
BUT IF I'M TO TAKE YOU, KILLER OF A HUNDRED...
...I MUST COME TO YOU.

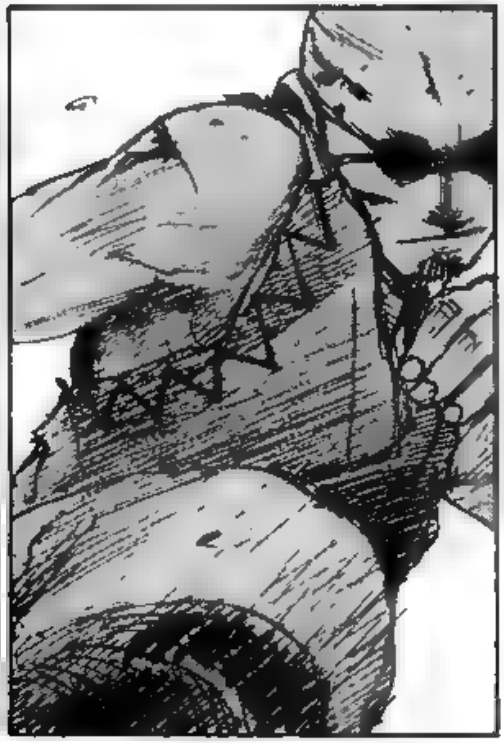
TRICKSTER
Part 4

Whoo!



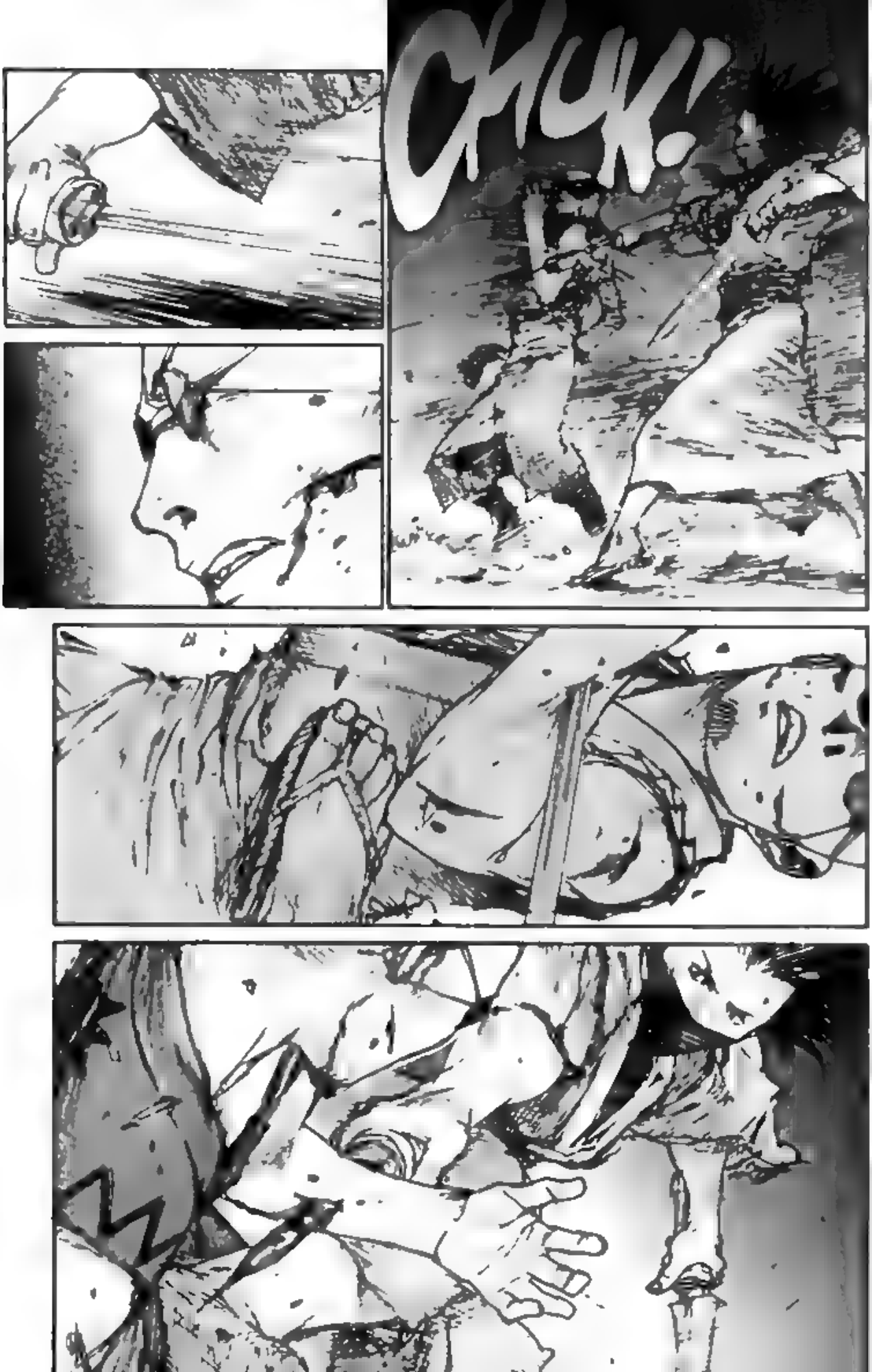

DAMN...
MY
LEG...

FWAK
!!
...NGN!



WHOO!

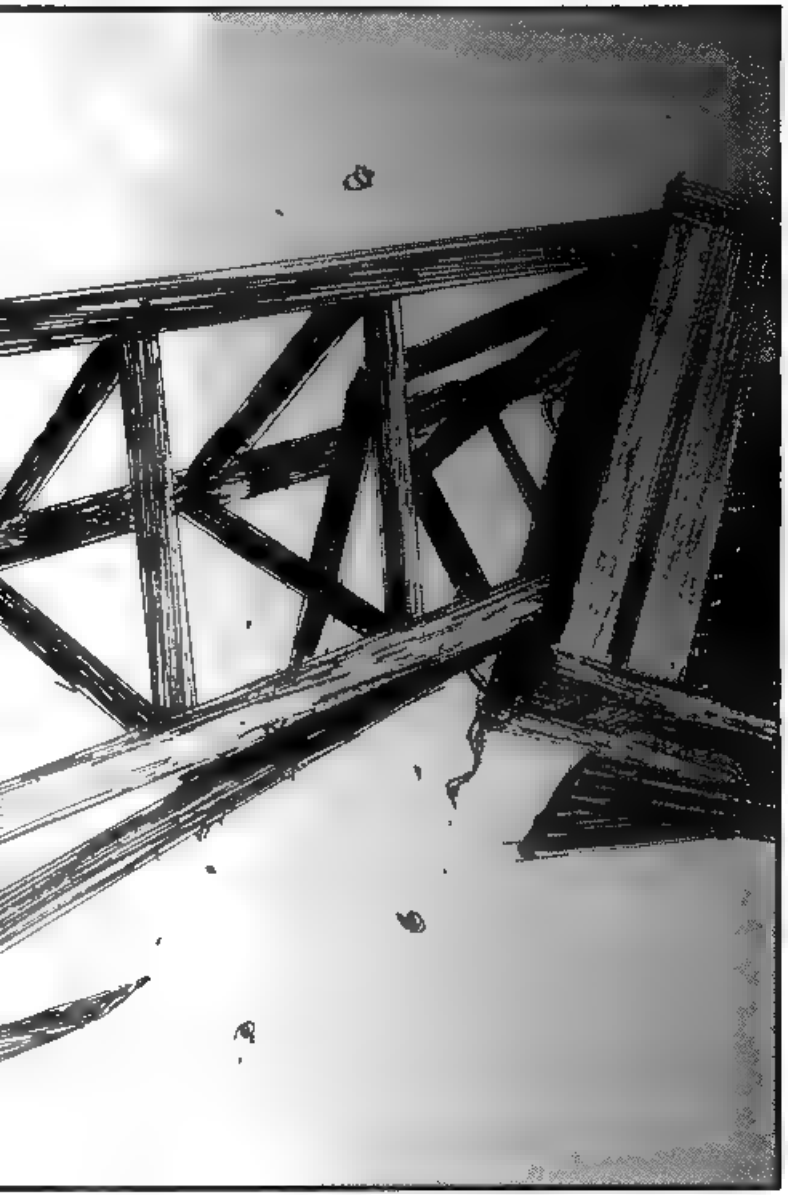
UNGH
KSHAK
!


CHUK!

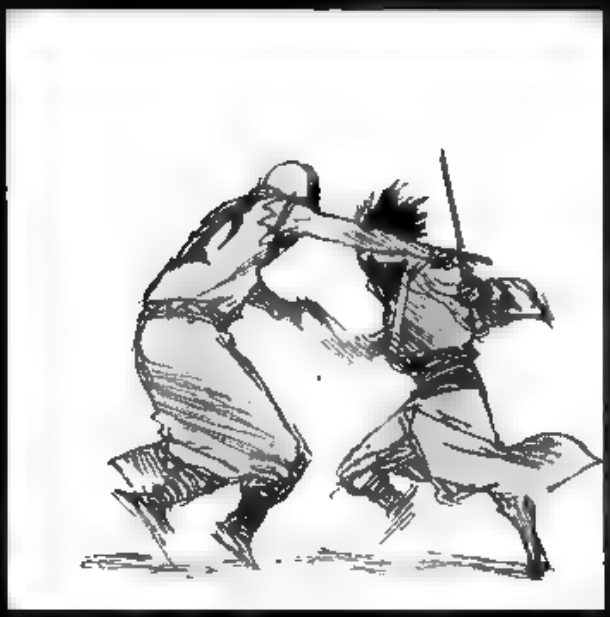
GUESS YOU KNOW IT... THE PROBLEM WITH THAT SCYTHE.
YOU CAN'T RUN ME THROUGH!

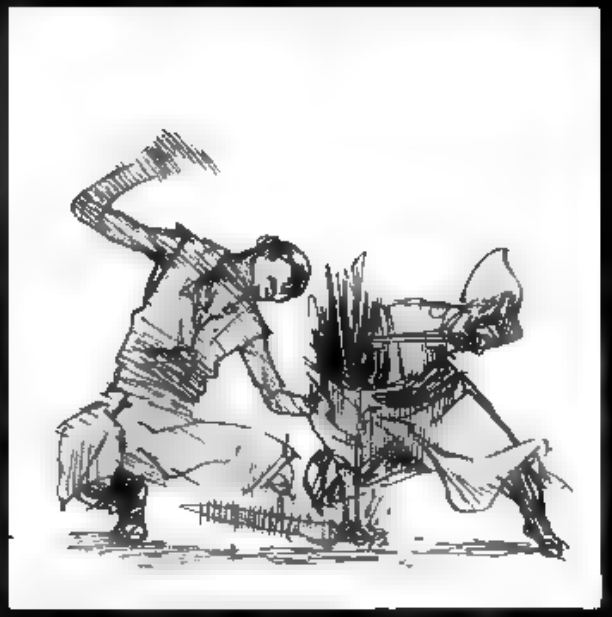
...MY SWORD CAN ALWAYS BLOCK IT.
IF IT COMES FROM THE SIDE...

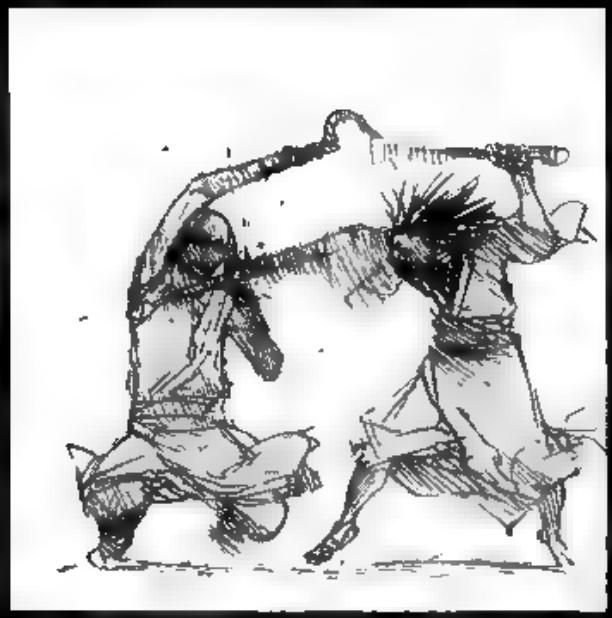
THEN HOW ABOUT THIS?
.....
.....
.....
MANJI...! YOU BASTARD!

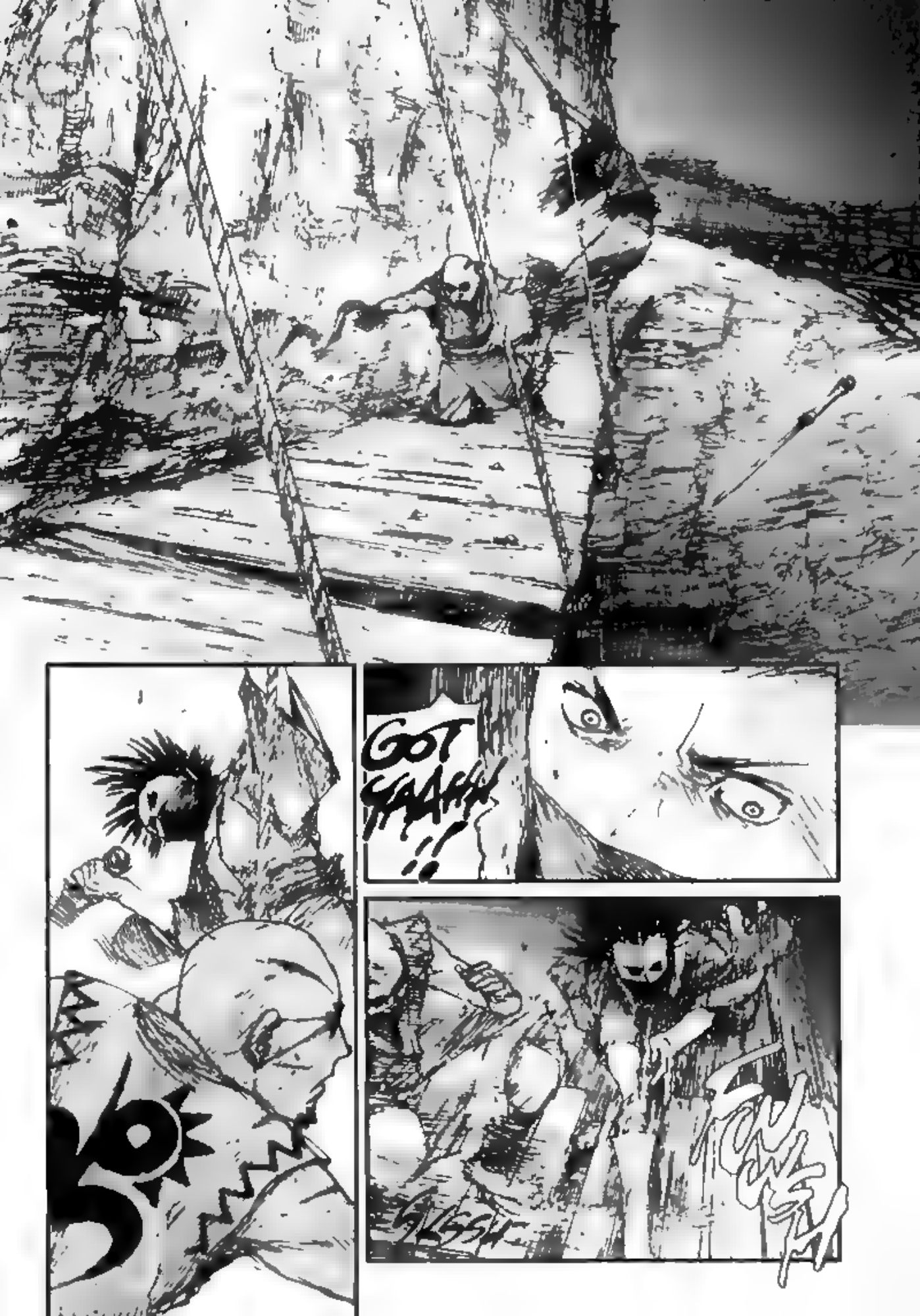


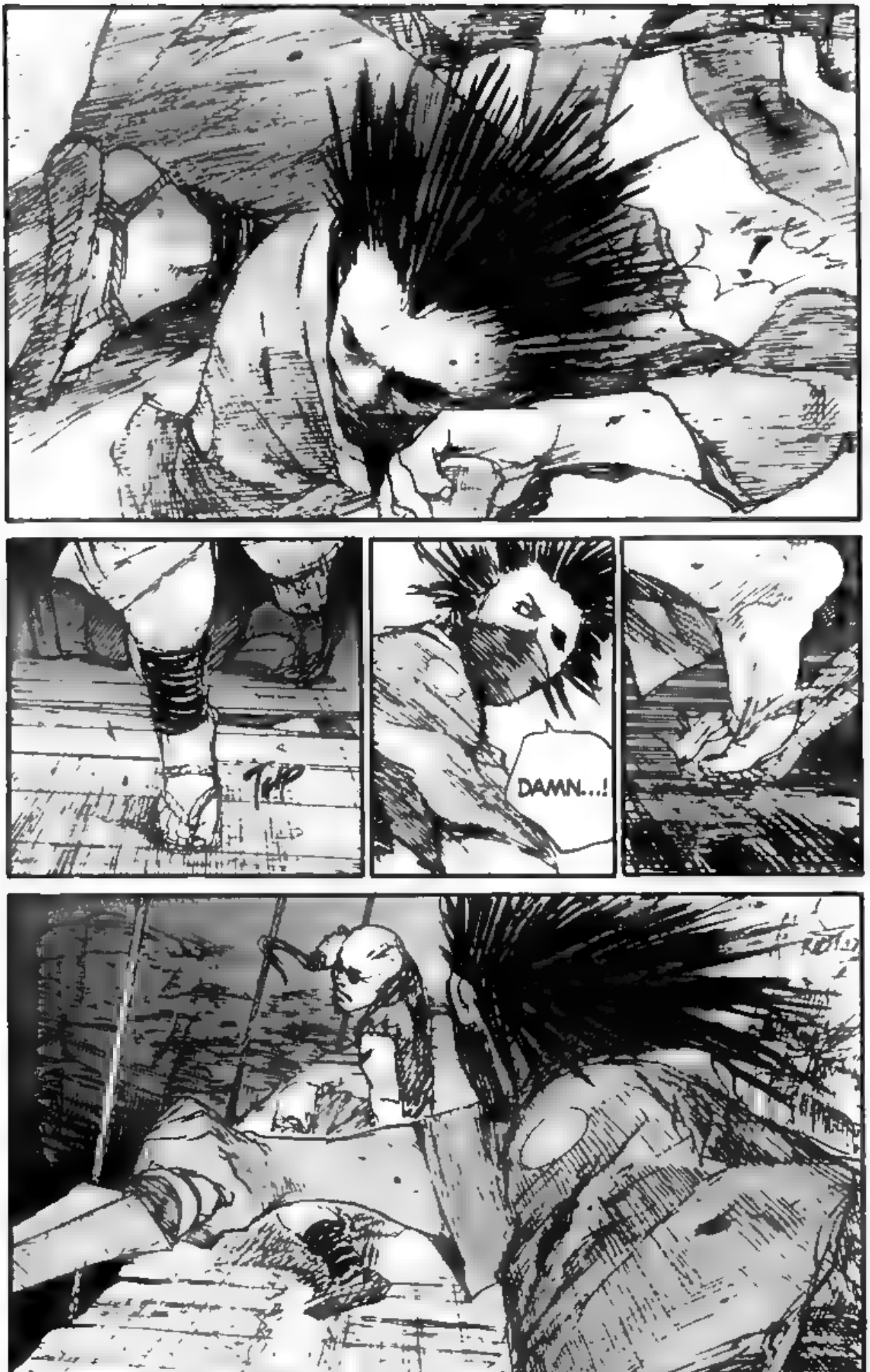
SWING

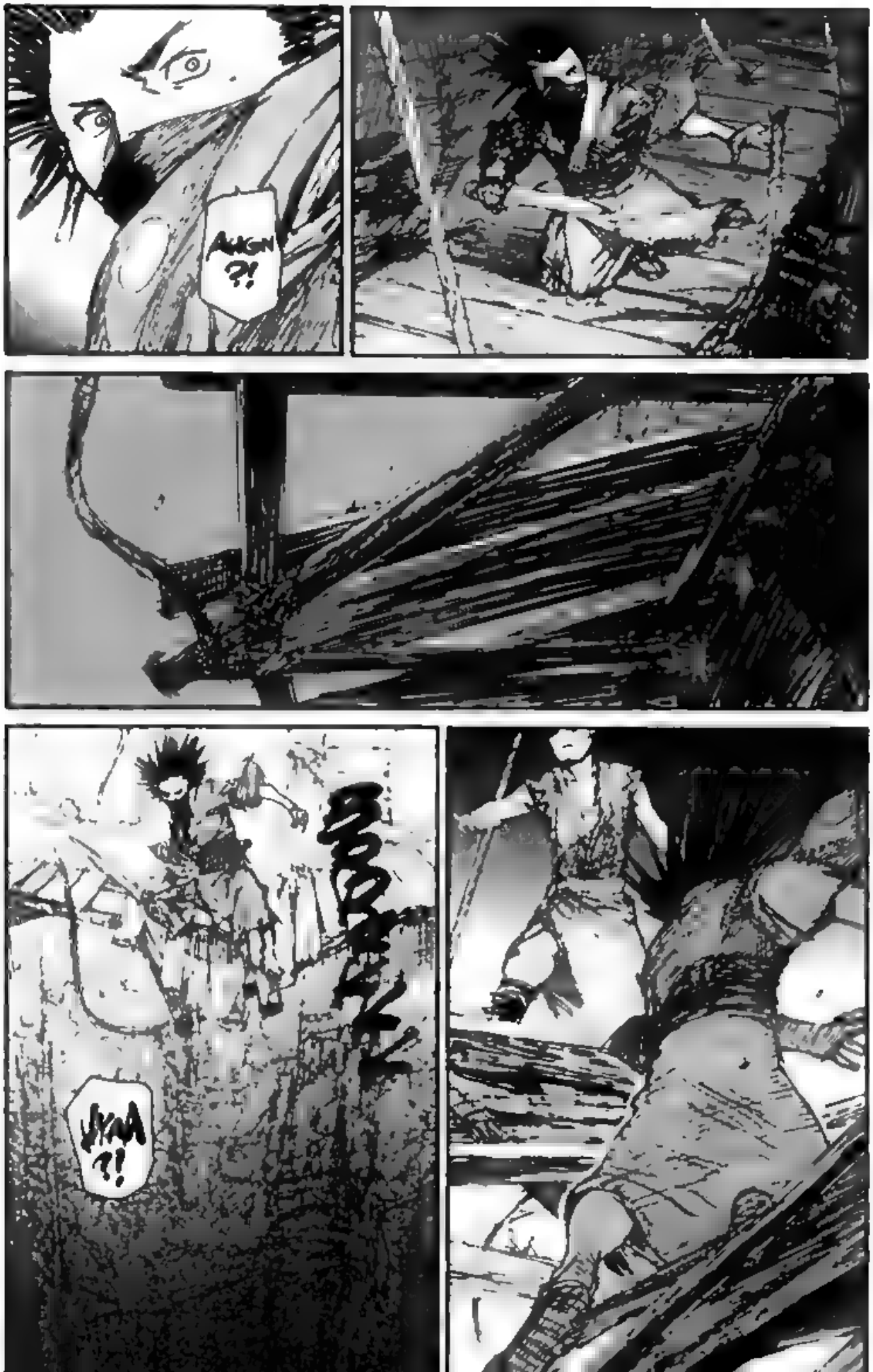


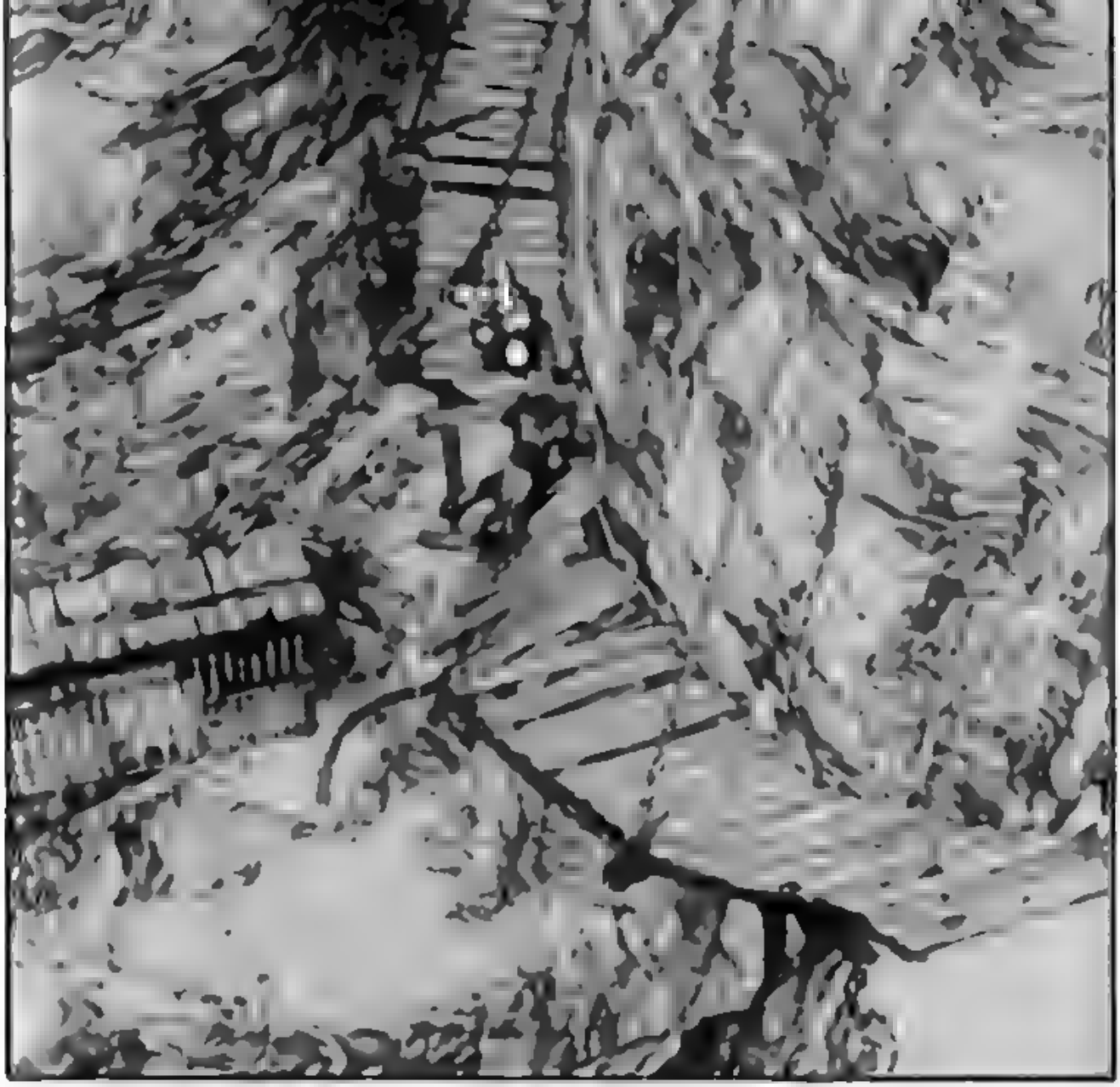


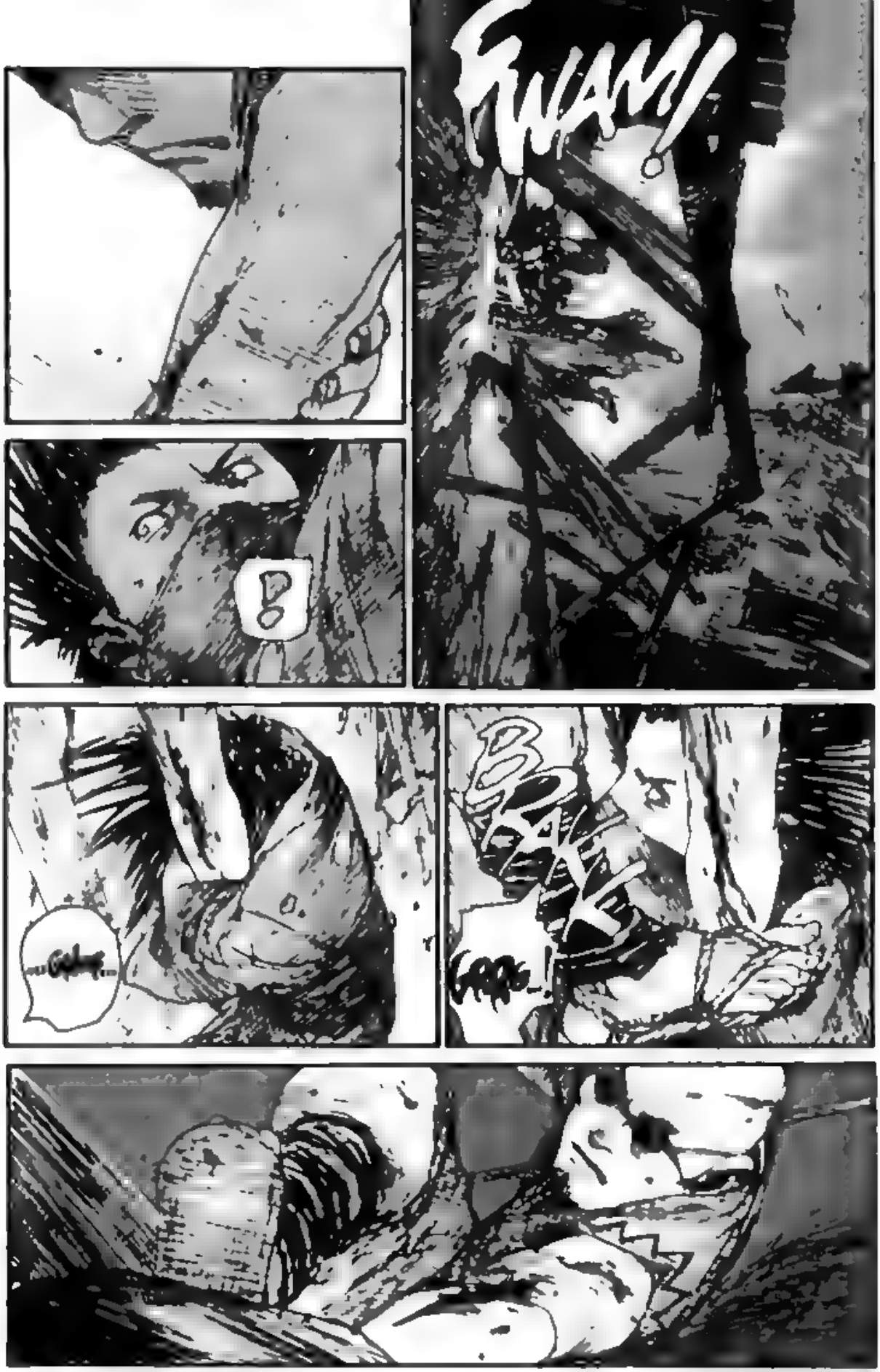



GOT
SLASH!!
SLASH
SLASH


!
TAP
DAMN...!


AUGH ?!
UWA ?!

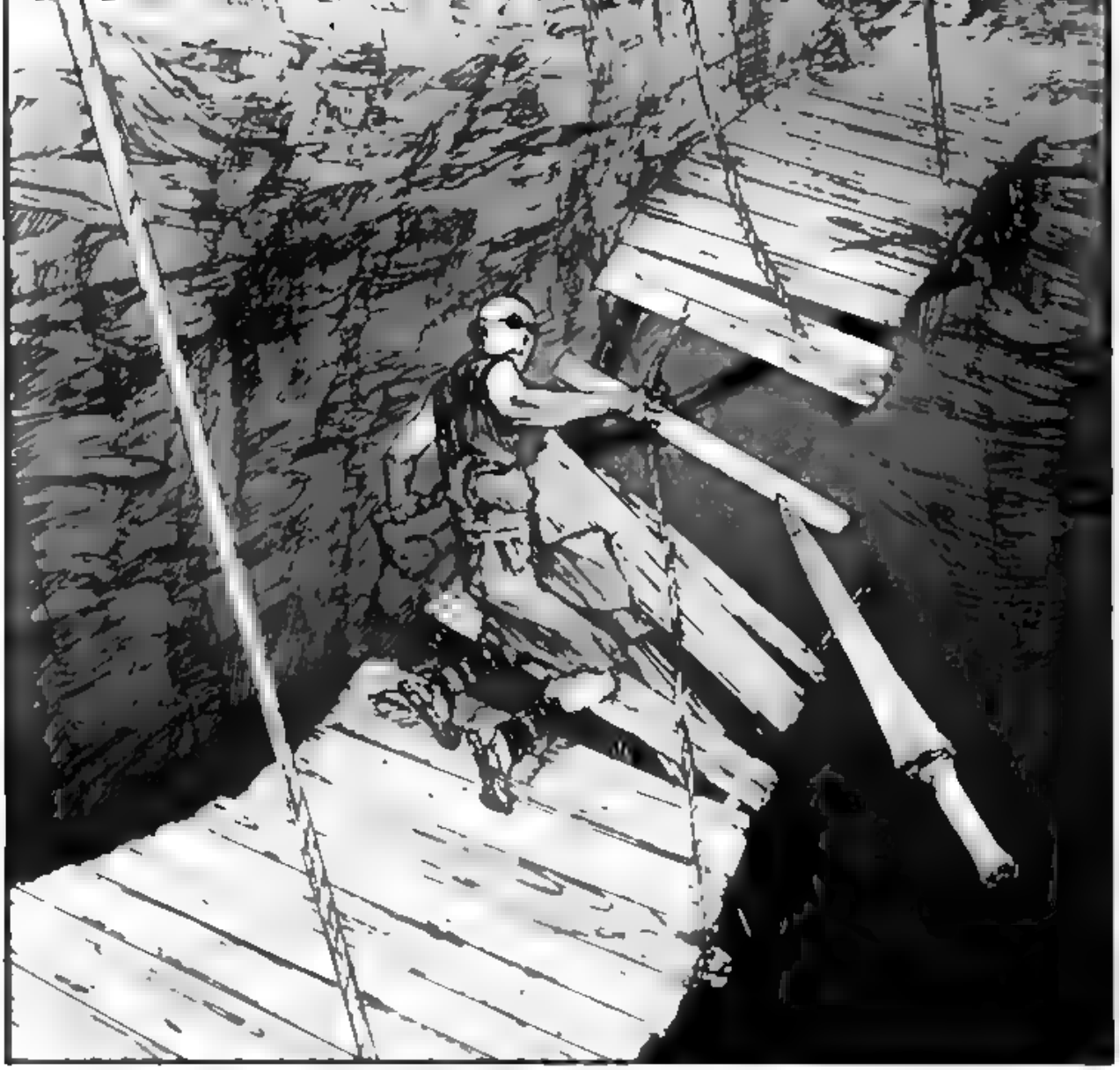


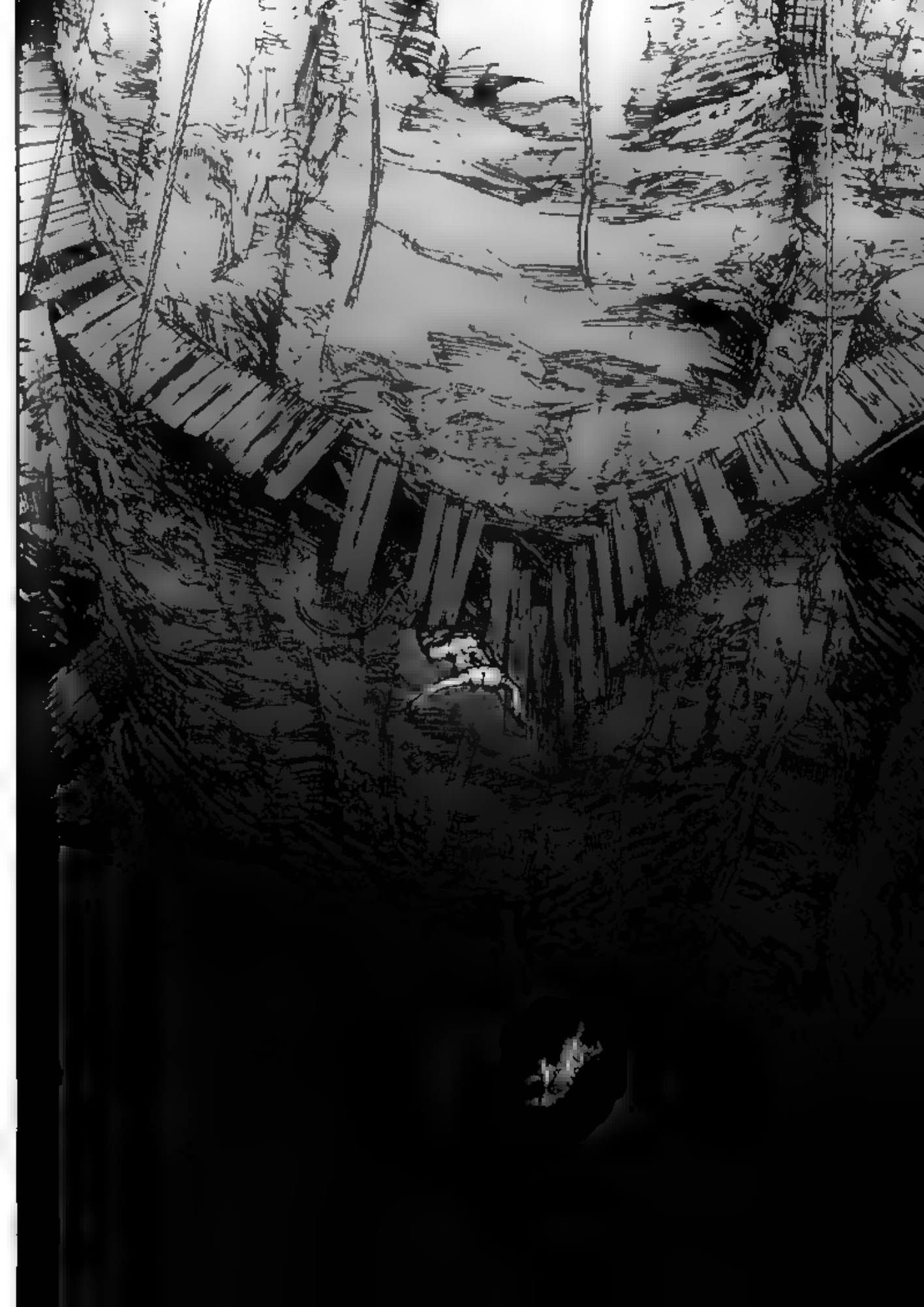

SWAM!
?
BAM
GRRR...!

.....
.....
.....
LEG
HNGN!
POK!
NGG!

HAH?!

!!





TRICKSTER
Part 5

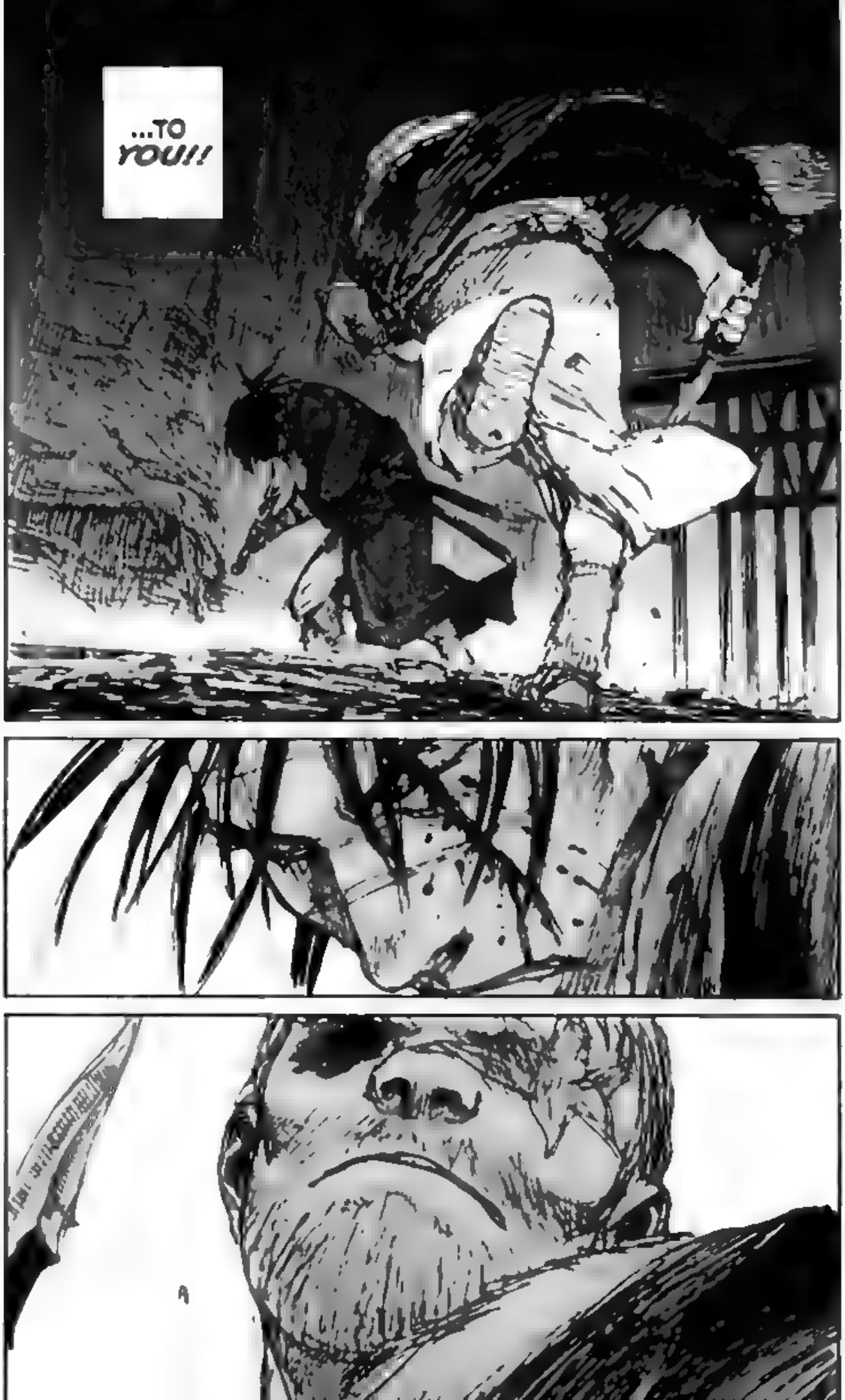
BOY. KNOW WHY A MAN CAN'T FIGHT A BEAR AND WIN BARE-HANDED?
...STRENGTH...?
STRENGTH? AYE, THERE'S THAT. BE NO CREATURE FRAILER THAN MAN...
BUT STRANGE, HAIN'T IT? WE CAN'T EVEN BEAT ONES SMALLER'N US. HOUNDS, APES...

SO WHAT SEPARATES MAN AN' BEAST?
KNOWIN', BOY. KNOWIN' ABOUT DEATH.
WE THINK ABOUT IT. TOO MUCH. ALWAYS.
A WOUND, AN ILLNESS, AND IT GRABS OUR GUTS. "MAYBE I'LL DIE!" MAKES US WEAK.
THE BEASTS.
'COURSE THEY SEE DEATH IN THEIR LIVES.
BUT TOUGH FOR US, THEY DON'T KNOW WHEN A HURT MEANS DEATH.
WHAT'S THEIR POWER?
THE POWER OF IGNO-RANCE! NOT CARIN' ABOUT THEIR FLESH.
DEATH, BOY.
DEATH FALLS FIRST ON THE ONE WHO SEES IT.

OLD MAN *SEN.* DOWN...
WHERE'S HIS... *LEFT SIDE...?*
...MAYBE HE'S... *DEAD...?*
MY LEFT EYE'S *CRUSHED.* BUT I FEEL... *NOTHING.*
IS IT THE SAME FOR *HIM...?*

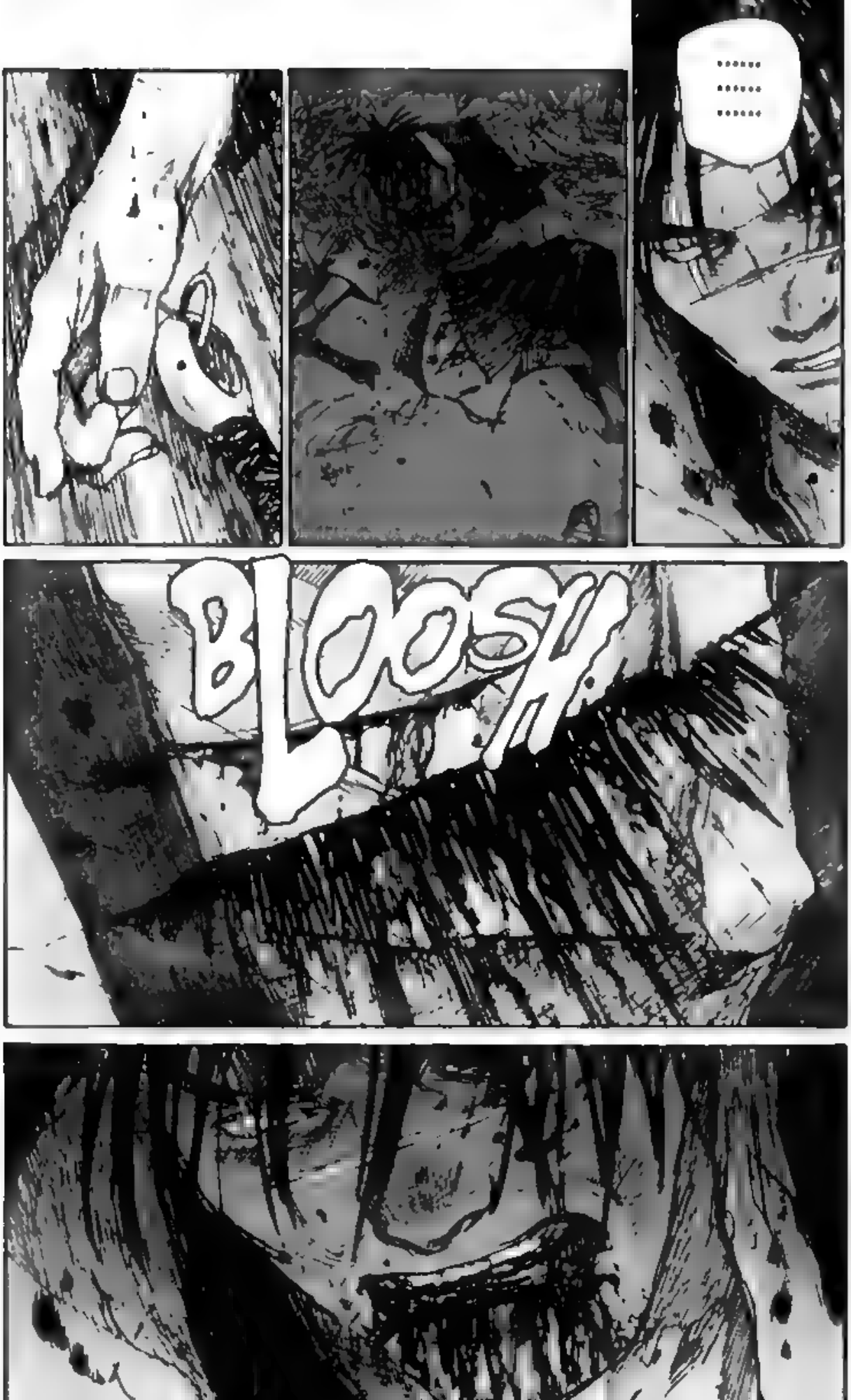
GUN WON'T DO IT.
TO TEACH HIM FEAR...
GRRAW AUU!

DEATH
COMES!


...TO
YOU!!

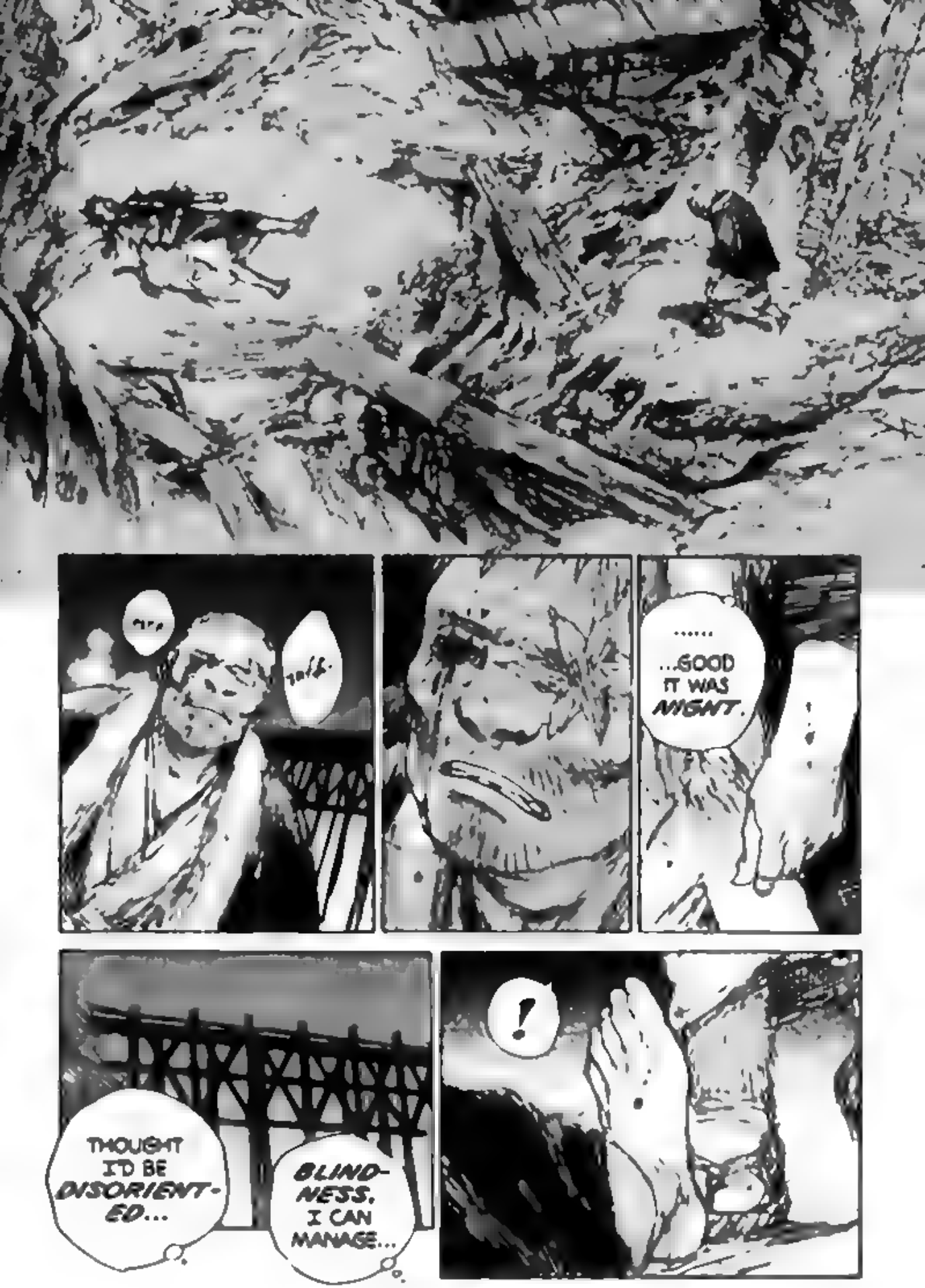
SHRUKK!
!!
UUAA USHH!

SKRRRRRK!


BLOOSH!

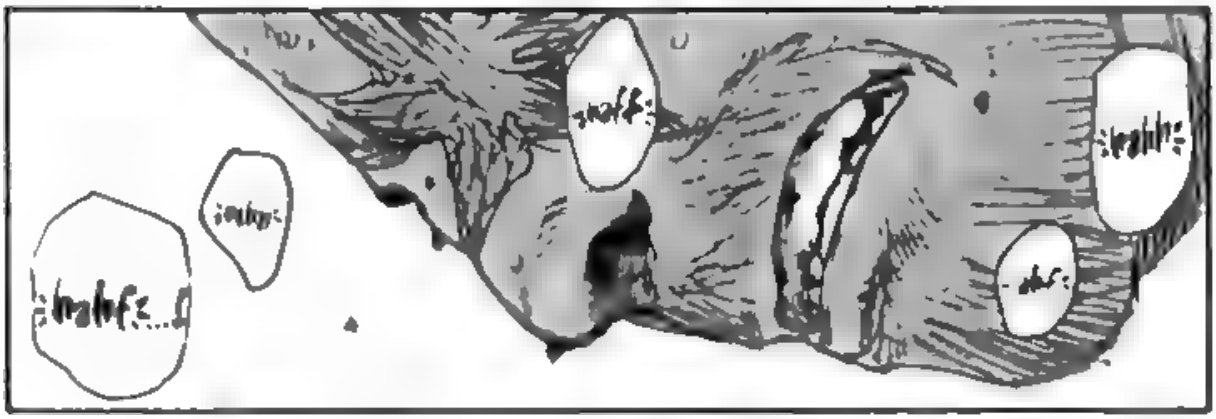
NNGH...
.....
.....
.....
...Ahhh...!
KILLER OF...
...A HUNDRED... HAVE I KILLED YOU?!

NO, NO. NOT YET...
DEAD!
HEARD HIS SPURTING BLOOD.
DID I...? YES! I FELT IT GO IN.
HIS HEAD!
.....
.....
.....
...THAT'S RIGHT.
WOUNDED BEAST... MUST...BE CAREFUL.


.....
...GOOD IT WAS NIGHT.
THOUGHT I'D BE DISORIENT-ED...
BLIND-NESS. I CAN MANAGE...
!

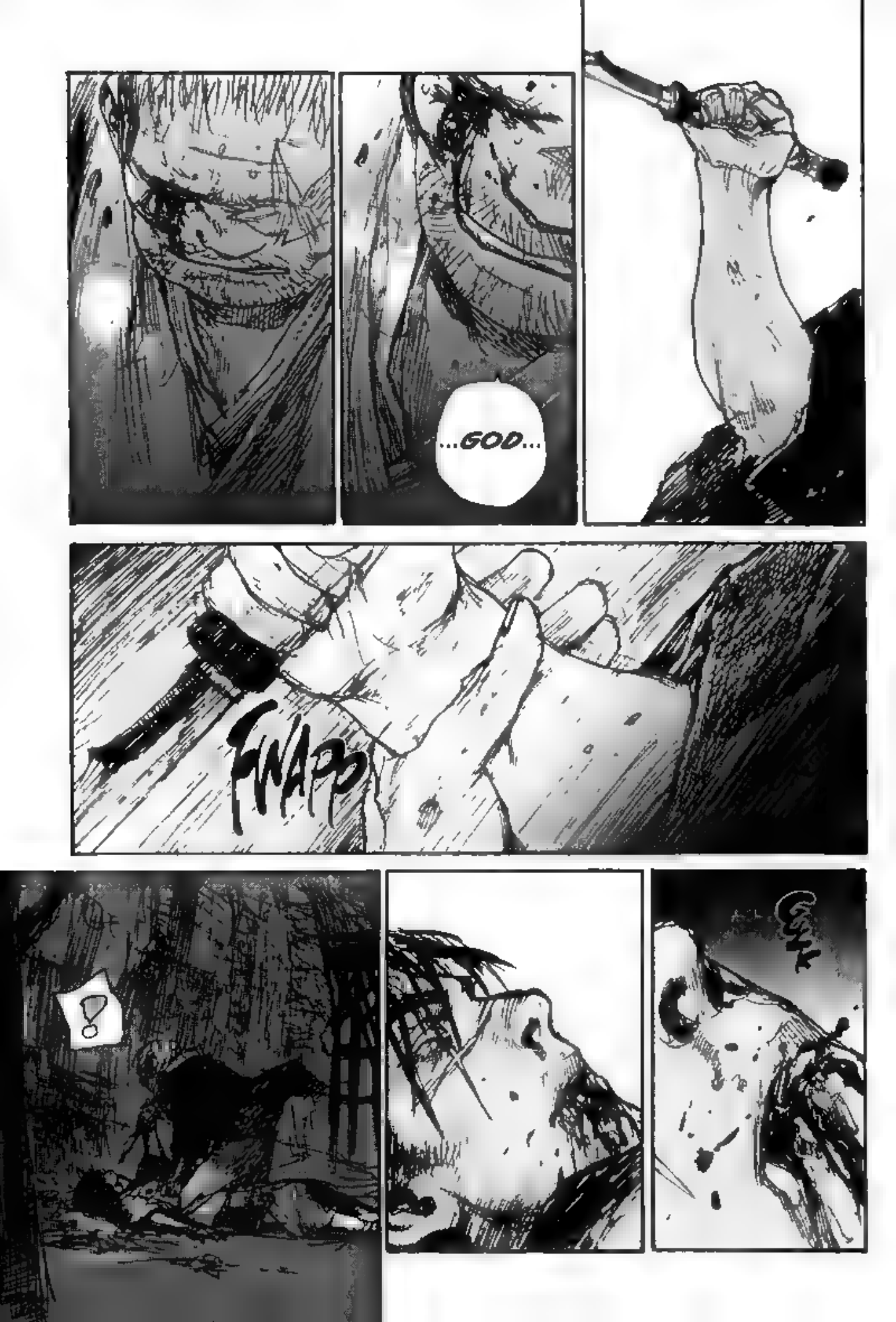
NO MOVEMENT. NOTHING.

SO MUCH BLOOD...
THEN IT WAS HIS HEART...
..AND NOW...
...THE HEAD.
WAIT...


snuff
snuff
snuff...
snuff
snuff

AFTER THE POISON, HALF AN HOUR AGO...
...OLD WOUNDS ACROSS HIS CHEST SPLIT OPEN.
THEN MINE. A THIRD.
THAT WOUND...
...SHOULD HAVE FINISHED HIM!

WHERE...
WHERE ARE THEY?


...GOD...
FNAPP
!
GUK

GOTTA THANK YOU...
...WAYAN KURISHIGE.
I MEAN, DAMN.
I DIDN'T USED TO... BE LIKE THIS.
BEEN LEANING ON MY FLESH...
GOT SLOPPY... SLOPPY AT EVERY-THING.
BUT YOU PUSHED ME TO THE WALL, AND I SAW.
THANKS, MAN.

HAH..?

...GIICHI!
HEY! GET UP, BALDY!
..NGG...
AND THE OTHER GUY? YOU GOT HIM?
MANJI... IS IT--?
AHH...

HE WILL LIVE...
...EH... DEPENDING ON HOW HE HIT.
THAT'S SOME-THING...
...BEATING THAT KID.
YOU HAVE SOME TIME.
SO, GICHI. WHAT NOW?
INTEREST-ING.
'COURSE...
WANNA FIGHT? THAT'D BE FINE BY ME.

...IF YA DO, I'LL WAKE HIM UP.
THESE THINGS AIN'T FUN IF THEY'RE NOT FAIR... RIGHT?
...NO.
ENOUGH. I DIDN'T COME TO DUEL. BESIDES...
...I DON'T WISH TO DEAL WITH HIM NOW. MY RIGHT ARM IS A WRECK.
GUESS SO...
MANJI.
AHNN?

PICK OFF THE EASY ONES, AND, IN TIME, ONLY THE HARD ARE LEFT.
DON'T LOSE YOUR FOCUS.
I KNOW, MAN. I KNOW.

WAKE THE DAMN KID? MAKE HIM TELL US?
NOT MUCH OF A CHOICE.

....SHIT!

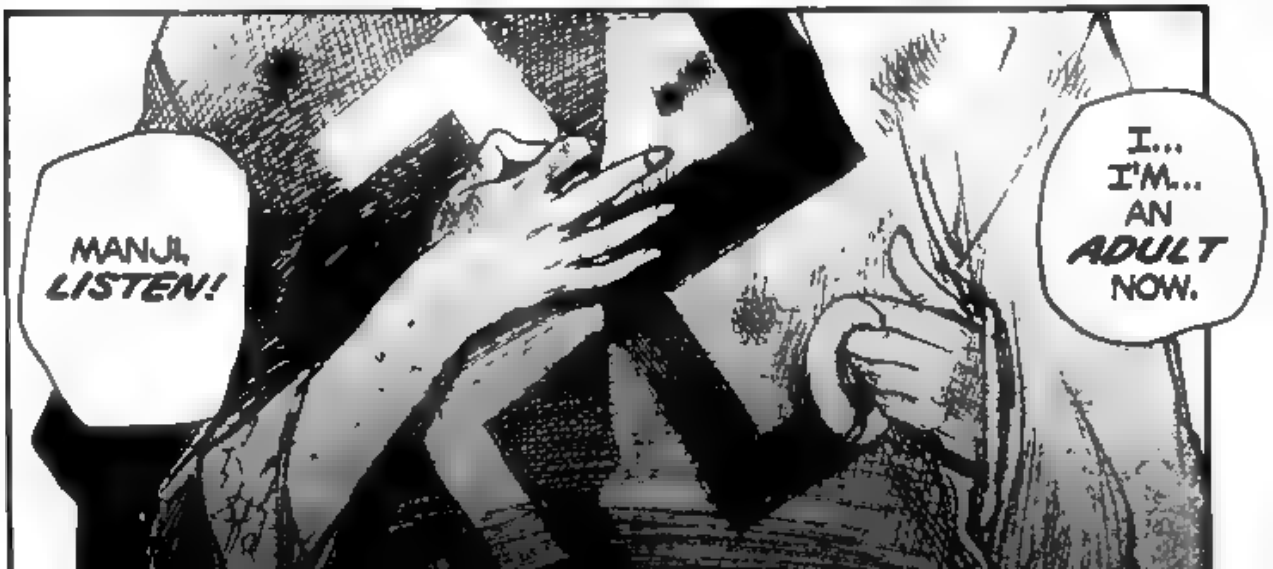
¡ahhh!:
¬hff:
¬hff:
¡ahh!:

...RIN...?

DAMN, GIRL...
TO GET THAT CRAP MEDI-CINE?

MANJI...!
I'M, I'M...
I'M ALWAYS PROTECT-ED!

BUT... EVEN ME...!
I CAN DO THINGS... FOR YOU.


MANJI, LISTEN!
I... I'M... AN ADULT NOW.

IF YOU'RE GONNA DIE, I...
...I'D SACRIFICE MY ARM! EASY!
...RIN.
WHAT AM I TO YOU?
YOUR BODY-GUARD, RIGHT?
WHY THE HELL ARE YOU PROTECTING ME?!

LOOK, CRYING LIKE A BABY AN' SCREAMING HOW YOU'RE GONNA AVENGE YOUR FOLKS? THAT *PROVES* YOU'RE STILL A KID.
AND WHAT THE HELL'S WRONG WITH *THAT?*
YOU DON'T GOTTA RUSH TO TURN INTO A BITTER *HARD-CASE,* DO YA, RIN?

PITY

SO YOU SAY YOU'VE HAD IT WITH THE ITTŌ-RYŪ... IS THAT WHAT YOU MEAN?
雪待
SIGN: YUKIMACHI

WELL, O-KANE?!

I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN HOW WELL YOU'VE TREATED US, NO. ONLY...
I *HEARD* ABOUT IT.
THAT *BUSI-NESS* AWHILE BACK.
LISTEN, ABAYAMA-SAN. THE *SHICHIBASHO* MAY *LOOK* PROSPEROUS... BUT WE'RE NOT LIKE *KITA.*
!
IF THE *BAKUFU* CRACKS DOWN, WE'RE GONE LIKE *FOAM.*
THAT'S THE KIND OF PLACE THIS IS, OUR *TATSUMI.*

WE'VE HAD ENOUGH OF FOLK WHO WANT TO FIGHT THE BAKUFU.
THIS ISN'T JUST YUKIMACHI'S O-KANE PLAYING COY.
IT'S THE CONSENSUS OF ALL THE BIG HOUSES HERE IN NAKA-MACHI.
AND ANOTHER THING.
.....
.....
.....
UNDER-STOOD.

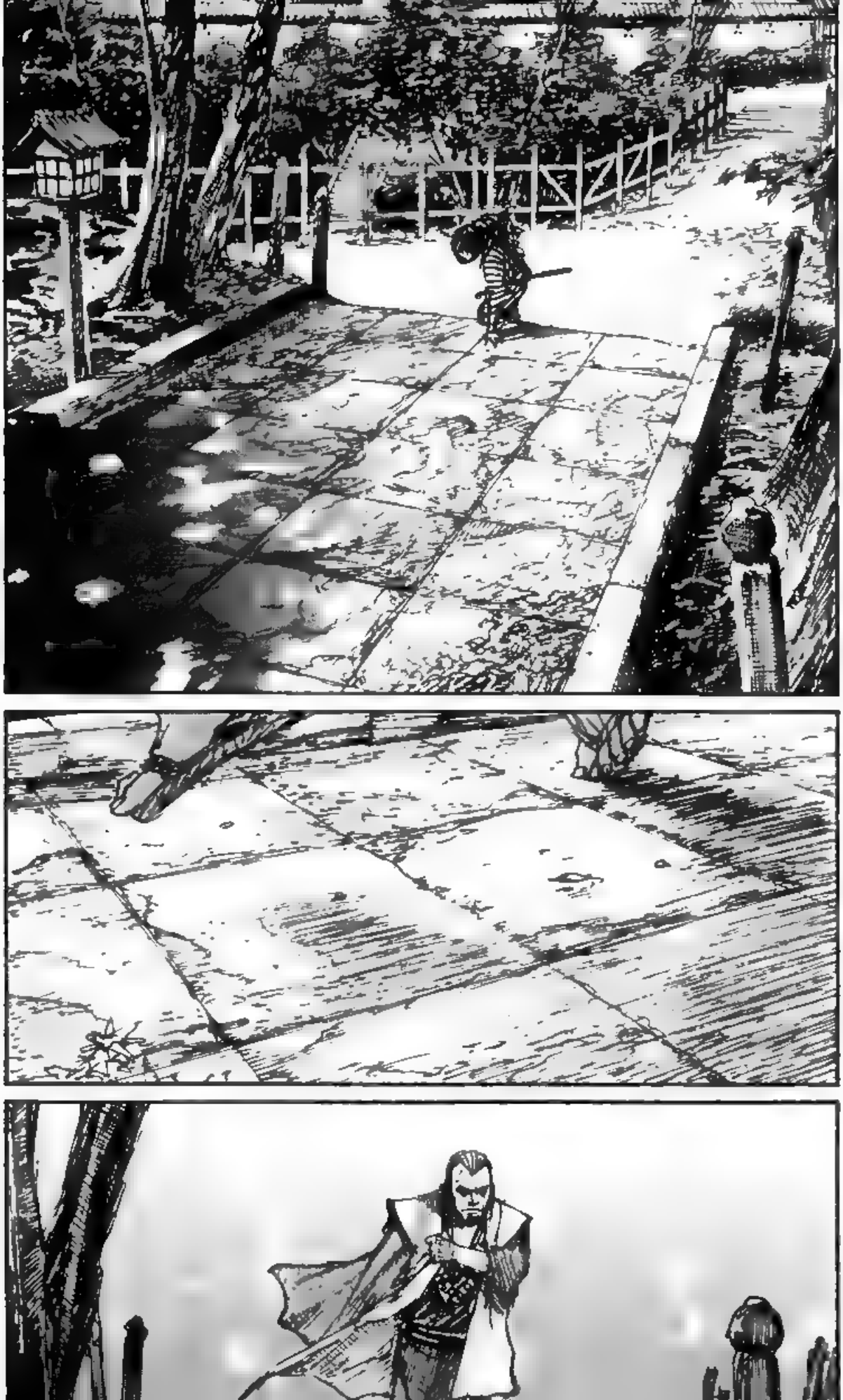
YOU STAY DAMN CLEAR, EVEN AS CUSTOMERS.
GOD KNOWS WHO ELSE'LL GET HERSELF KILLED...
.....
.....
.....

I WANTED TO SEE HOW O-SEI'S DOING, BUT I CAN'T FIND HER.
YOU KNOW WHERE SHE WENT, HAYA?
O-SEI-SAN DOESN'T... WORK HERE ANYMORE...
EH?! SOMEONE BOUGHT HER FREE-DOM?!
SHE'S DEAD.
BUT HE GOT THE MEASLES LAST WINTER, SEE?
STARVE, OR JOIN OUR LITTLE WORLD.
HE WAS A STREET MER-CHANT.
I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT O-SEI-SAN. HER FOLKS DIED WHEN SHE WAS A KID, SO SHE LIVED WITH HER OLDER BROTHER.

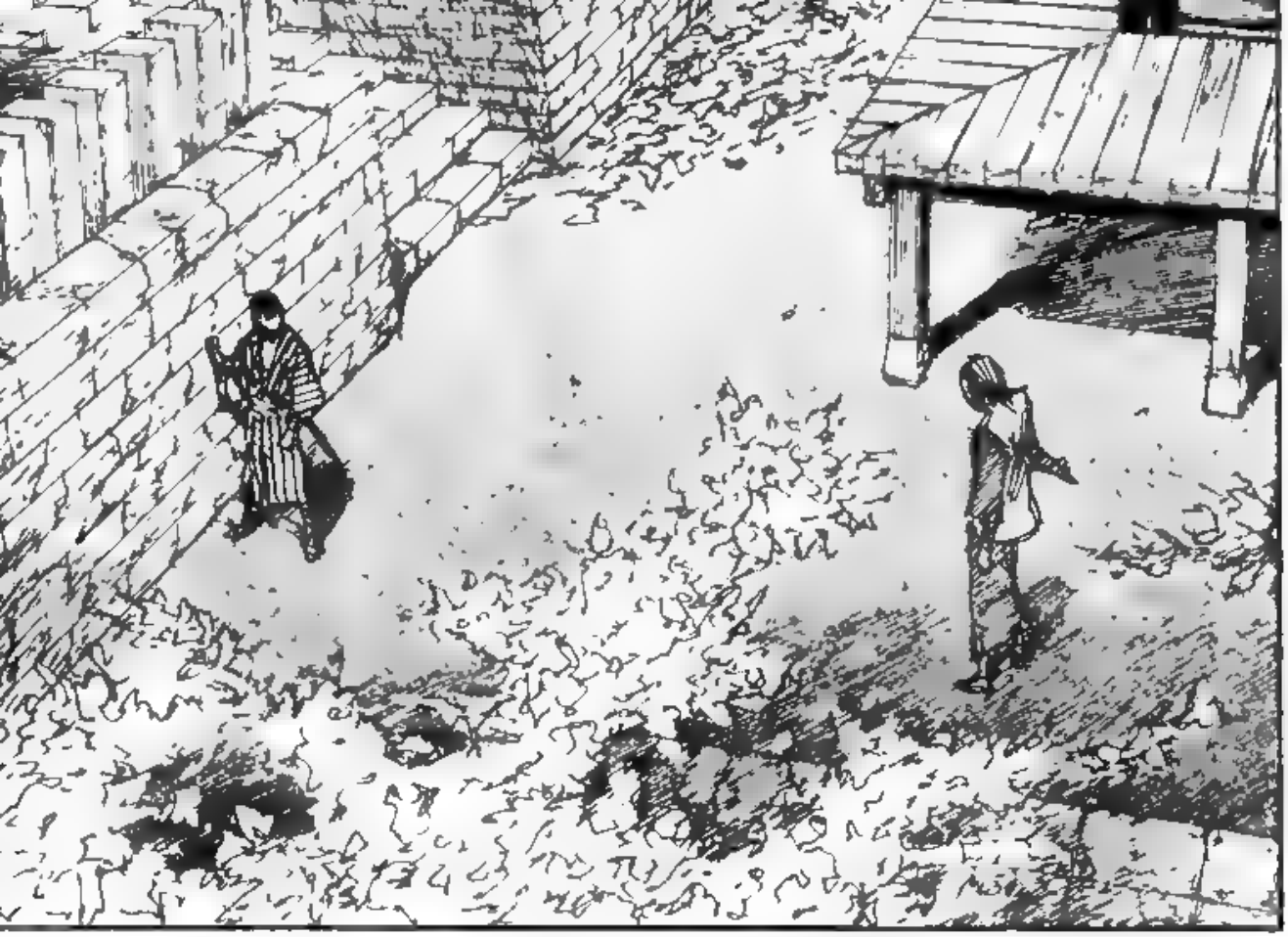
AND THEN? HER BODY HACKED UP LIKE THAT?
WHORE. NO-THING. ALL SHE COULD DO...
...WAS HANG HER-SELF WITH HIM.

HOW MAY I HELP YA, SIR?
LET'S SEE. TWO SHŌ OF SALT...
THEN ONE OF...

AH...?!
WHY...
...THE FUCK IS HE ALIVE?!
COME BACK HERE!!



:Huhf!:
:Huhf!:
:Huhf!:
RIGHT, MAKOTO?
DON'T NEED TO RUN, EH?



I ALWAYS *THOUGHT* YOU WERE WORKING FOR SOMEONE.
BUT HELL, BOY. THE *BAKUFU*...? GUESS I *MIS-JUDGED* YOU. LET YOU *SWIM* TOO LONG.

AM I *WRONG*?

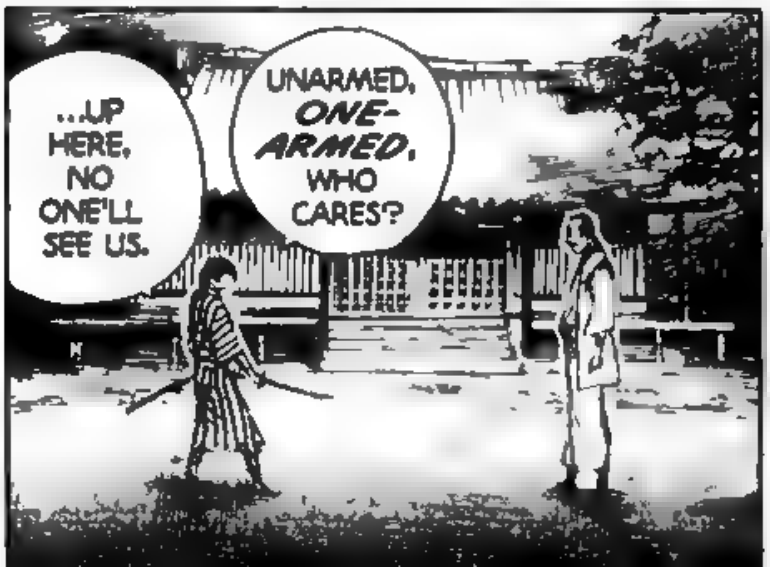
.....
.....

HEY...
...NO POINT KILLING YOU NOW.
RISKING CERTAIN DEATH LIKE THAT, SO YOUNG? GUESS YOU HAD REASONS.
THAT LITTLE DRAMA AT THE BANQUET WAS HABAKI KAGAMURA'S DOING. YOU WEREN'T EVEN A WALK-ON...
...BUT STILL...
...IT'S POLITE TO APOLOGIZE BEFORE YOU RUN. EH?!

I WASN'T TRYING... TO *RUN*.
I CAME UP HERE, 'CUZ I COULDN'T *KILL YOU*...
...BACK THERE.
!
EVEN ONE OF YOU *ITTŌ-RYŪ* SHITS...
...KILLING AN UNARMED MAN WOULD JUST...
...*DISTURB* ANY ONLOOKERS.

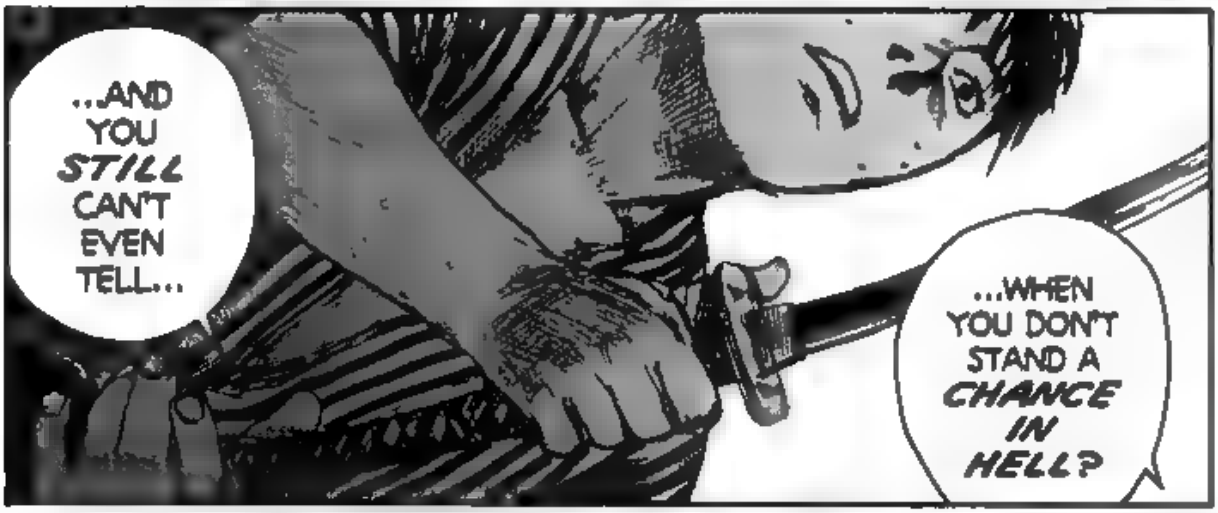
AND REASONS?! SCREW THAT! THEY BOUGHT ME OUT OF YOSHICHŌ...
...AND THE NEXT THING I KNOW, I'M DOING THIS.

I'M FORCED TO FIGHT YOU NOW.
WHETHER YOU KILL ME OR NOT...


...UP HERE, NO ONE'LL SEE US.
UNARMED, ONE-ARMED, WHO CARES?

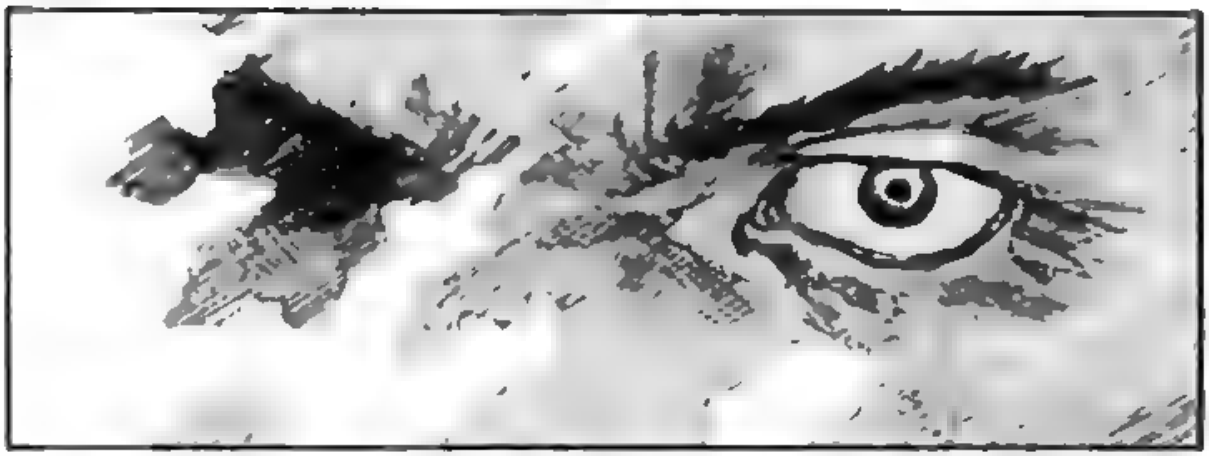
BWAH HAH HAH!
GEHH HEH. HEH...
?!
CHILD.
YOU THOUGHT THE OLD COOT'D BE UN-ARMED?

CARELESS, CARE-LESS, MAKOTO.
WE EAT OUTTA THE SAME POT FOR THREE MONTHS...


...AND YOU STILL CAN'T EVEN TELL...
...WHEN YOU DON'T STAND A CHANCE IN HELL?

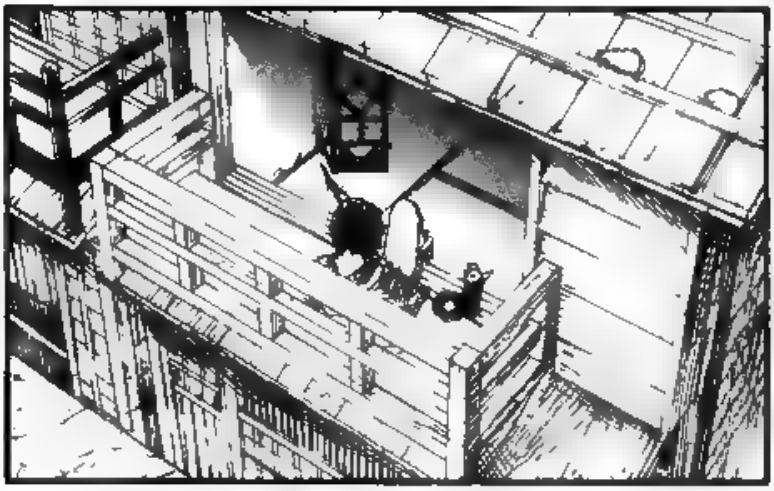
MAKOTO, YOU NEVER BELONGED IN OUR WORLD.

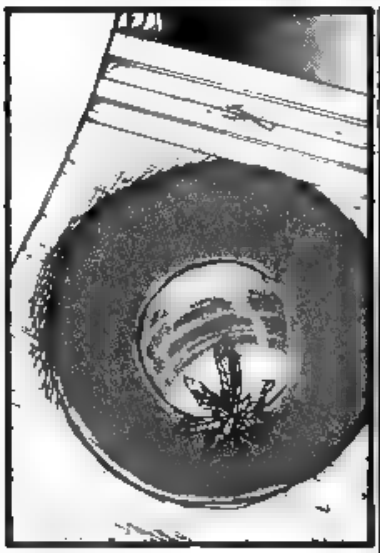
SHUT UP!



PITIFUL...

HABAKI KAGIMURA!
MUST YOU MAKE THIS OLD MAN KILL A MERE CHILD LIKE HIM?





O, Sumida river
The parting boat
Stirs your autumn leaves

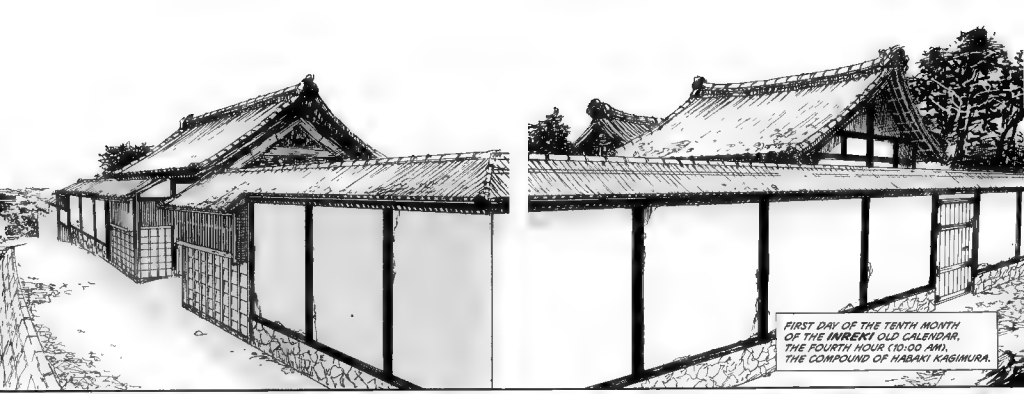
To the long-waiting songstress
I hear you whisper
He shall not come this way again

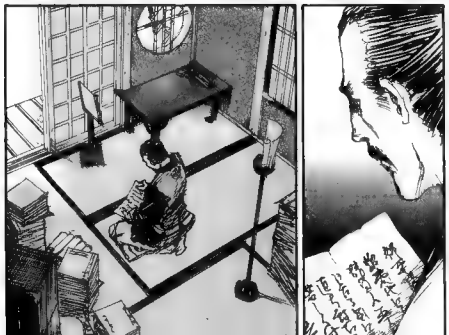
In Yanagi-bashi,
The shamisen cry of life's deep sorrows
Shall be our nightingale song of spring

And so, let us go
Stepping on one corpse
Stepping on two

Stumble once upon the fallen
And lonely sparrows shall scatter
From their old bamboo

FORSAKEN


FIRST DAY OF THE TENTH MONTH OF THE INREKI OLD CALENDAR, THE FOURTH HOUR (10:00 AM). THE COMPOUND OF HABAKI KAGIMURA.



MASTER... THAT MAN IS HERE.

SIR...
WAS THE MESSAGE FROM THE GO-RŌJŪ?

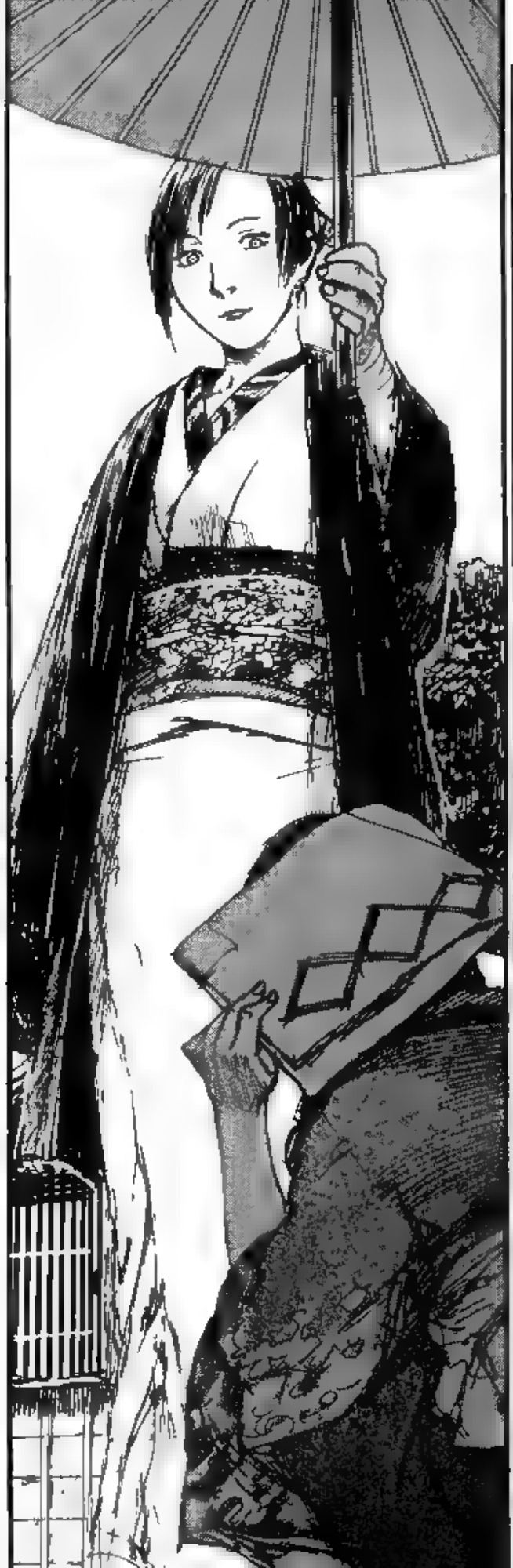
MM. YOU REMEMBER THE INCIDENT IN OTARU, UP IN EZO? FIVE TRADE OFFICIALS, KILLED IN ONE NIGHT?
YES, SIR.
WE ASSUMED THAT THE KILLERS TOOK THE GOLD AND RAN...BUT, FOR WHATEVER REASON, IT SEEMS THEY'RE HIDING HERE, IN THE SHADOW OF EDO CASTLE.

IF LOCATED, KILL THEM. OR...
...PERHAPS...

.....
.....
MUGAI-RYŪ AGAIN, SIR?
MUGAI-RYŪ.
ITTŌ-RYŪ.
NOW THIS MAN I'M ABOUT TO MEET...
WHAT THE DEVIL ARE YOU ALL RESISTING?
A TIME OF PEACE?
OUR SWORDS AND OUR CANON...
...SHRIVEL-ING AWAY.
IT'S INESCAP-ABLE.

BUT IF IT MUST BE SO...
...SURELY YOU COULD FADE AWAY WITHOUT THE PAIN?
YOU'RE TRAGIC, ALL OF YOU.
SO TRAGIC.
I ENVY YOU.

AH?!
RAIN...!
"LISTEN, RIN."
"THIS TIME, FOR ONCE, DON'T FREAK ME OUT."
"DON'T LEAVE THIS GATE."
WHAT SHOULD I DO...?

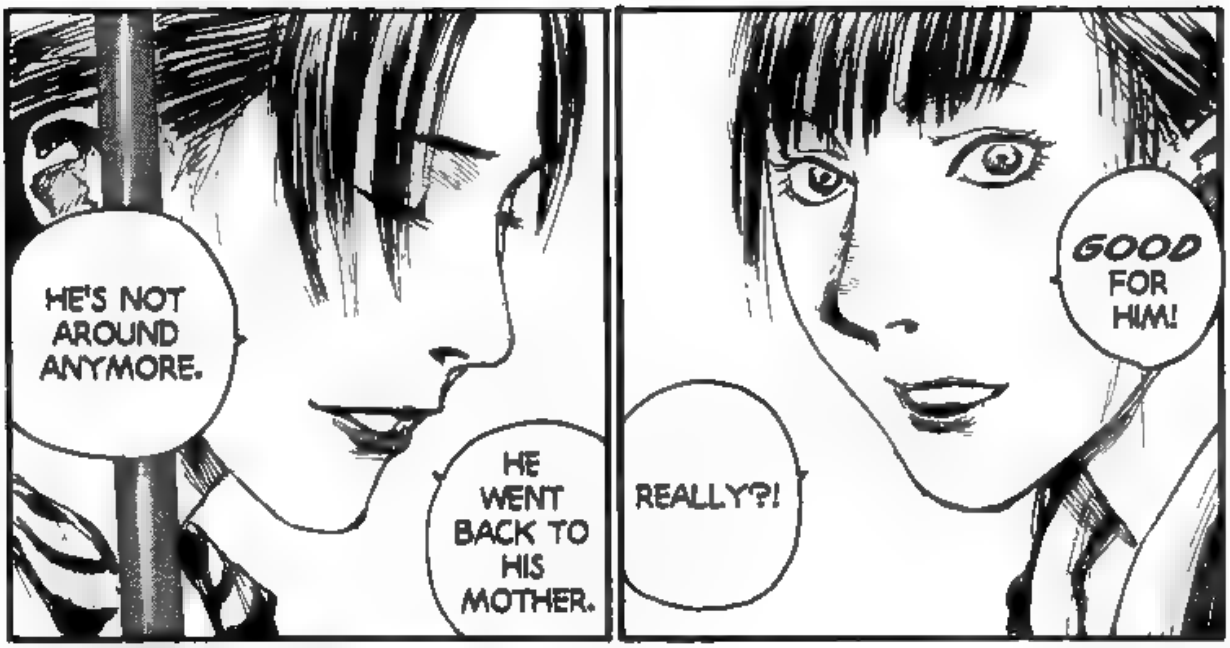


SILLY GIRL.
YOU COULD'VE WAITED INSIDE.

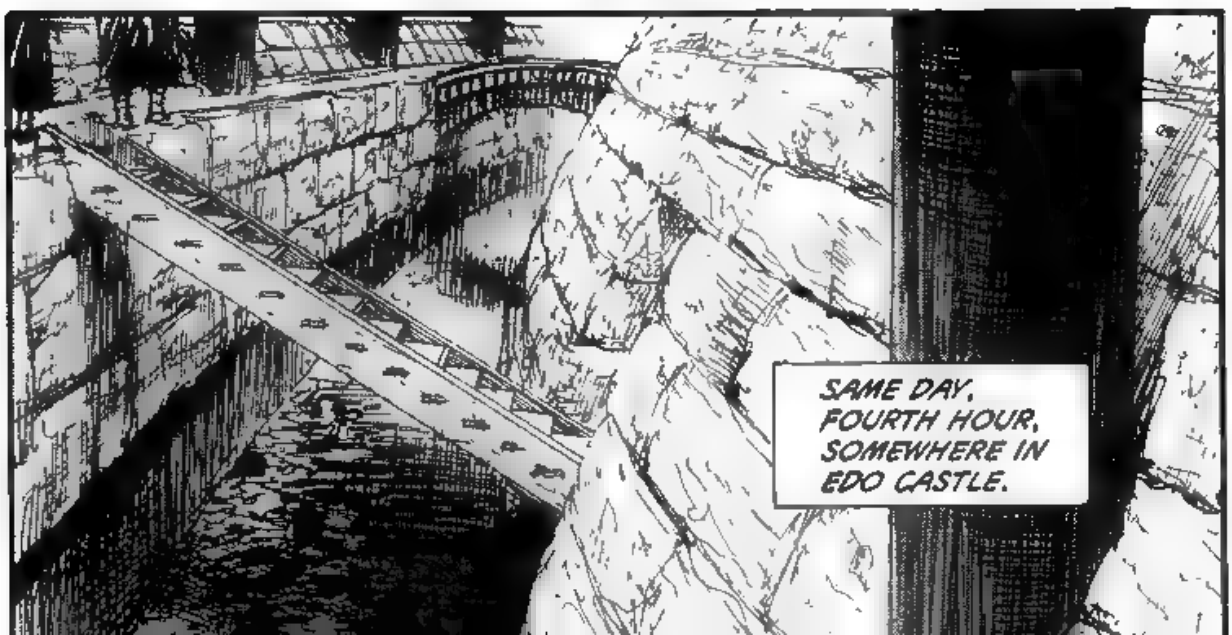
HY... HYAKU-RIN...?

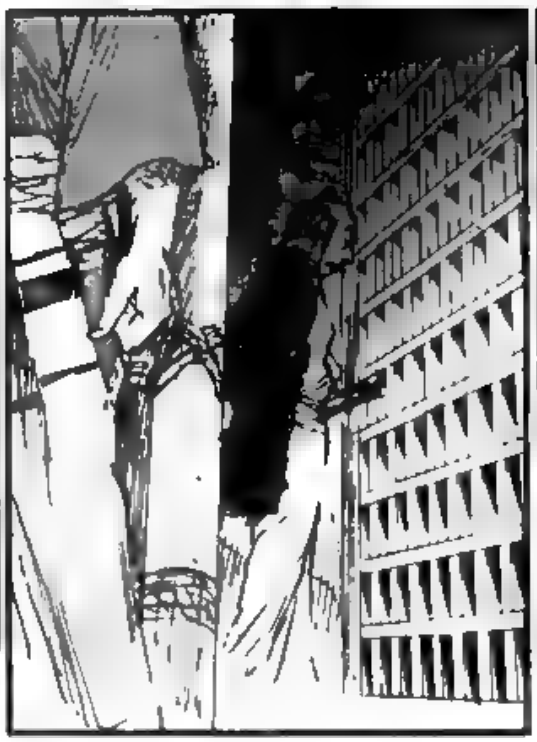
BUT MANJI...
HE SAID GOD KNOWS WHAT'D GO DOWN... TO WAIT OUTSIDE--
HAH! DON'T BE A WORRY-WART!

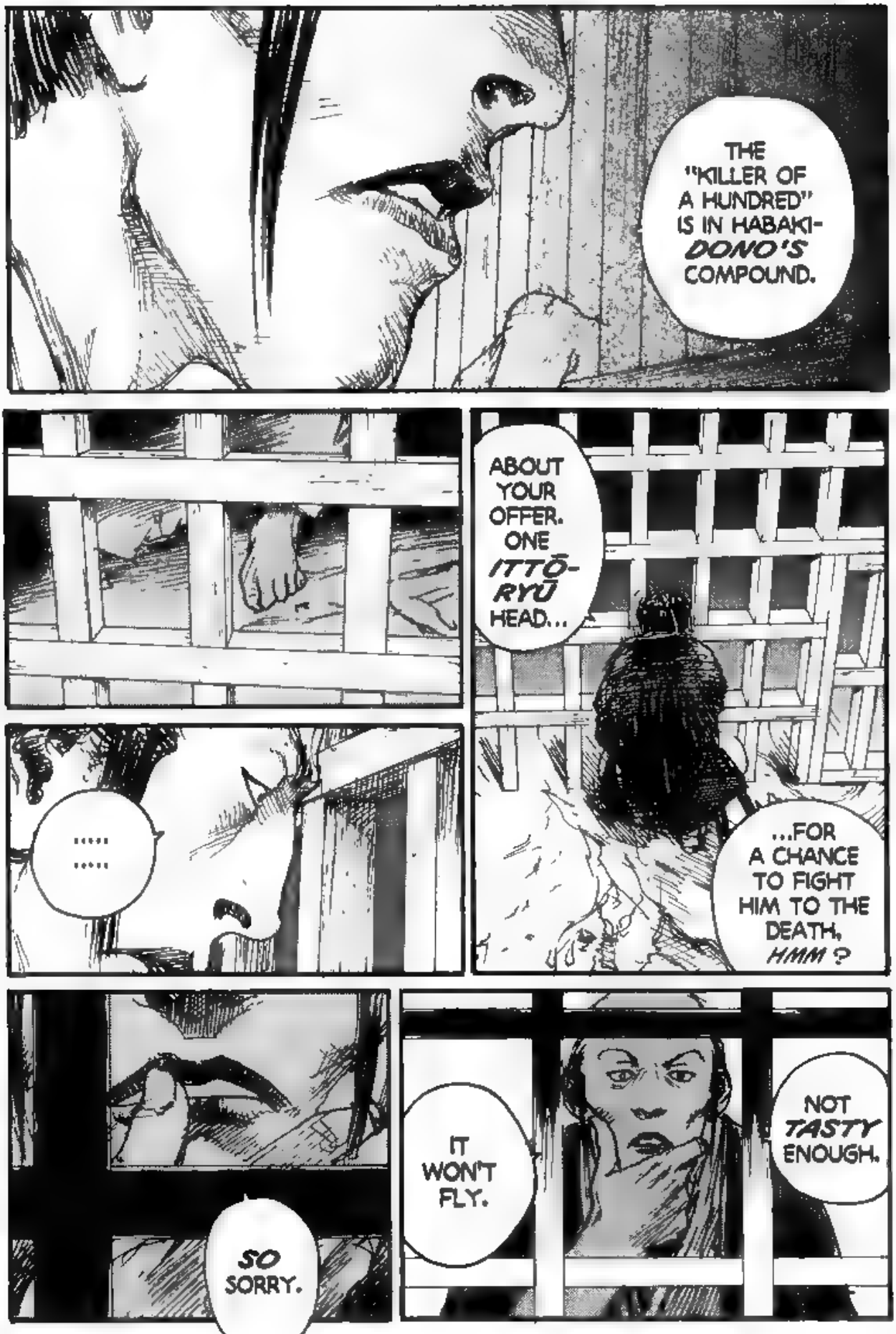
I MEAN, IT'S RAIN-ING...
SAY... WANNA GET SOME SWEETS?
OH... YES!
GOSH. I GUESS I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE THE BATH HOUSE.
YOU KNOW, YOU LOOK... HOW TO PUT IT? STALWART, RIN.
Y-YOU THINK SO? I LOST SOME WEIGHT...
AH! THAT'S IT! YOU'RE THINNER. SKINNY!
HYAKURIN, YOUR ARM?
OH. SPRAINED IT.
ARE YOU STILL WITH THAT GUY?
WHAT'S HIS NAME. UHM...
SHINRIJI! HIM?


HE'S NOT AROUND ANYMORE.
HE WENT BACK TO HIS MOTHER.
REALLY?!
GOOD FOR HIM!

ISN'T IT, THOUGH?


SAME DAY, FOURTH HOUR, SOMEWHERE IN EDO CASTLE.




THE "KILLER OF A HUNDRED" IS IN HABAKI-DONO'S COMPOUND.
ABOUT YOUR OFFER. ONE ITTŌ-RYŪ HEAD...
...FOR A CHANCE TO FIGHT HIM TO THE DEATH, HMM?
.....
.....
IT WON'T FLY.
NOT TASTY ENOUGH.
SO SORRY.

FOUR HEADS.
THE ONE YOU WANT, MAGATSU TAITO...
...AND AT LEAST THREE MORE.
FURTHER-MORE...
...WE DECIDE THE ORDER.
FIRST, THE ADDITIONAL THREE.
THEN MAGATSU.
AND FINALLY...
...MISTER ONE-HUNDRED.
A WORD TO THE WISE!
GO CRAZY WITH HATE, SWITCH THE ORDER...

...AND THE METSUKE'S MEN WILL KILL YOU ON THE SPOT.
OF COURSE, THIS IS OUR WAY OF MAKING SURE YOU DON'T SKIP OFF HALF DONE.
THINK ABOUT IT!
JUST FOUR!
DO FOUR ITTŌ-RYŪ, AND YOU'RE FREE AS A LITTLE BIRDY...
...TO DIE IN A DITCH, TO FIND A JOB AND GO STRAIGHT.
YOUR CHOICE.
TOO GOOD TO TURN DOWN, NO?

HEH... HEH, HEH...
...FOUR... FUCKERS...

JUST... FOUR, YOU SAY?
PAL, YOU MAY NOT KNOW IT, BUT...

...I'VE ALREADY WHACKED...
...THIRTY ITTŌ-RYŪ GUYS, AT LEAST.

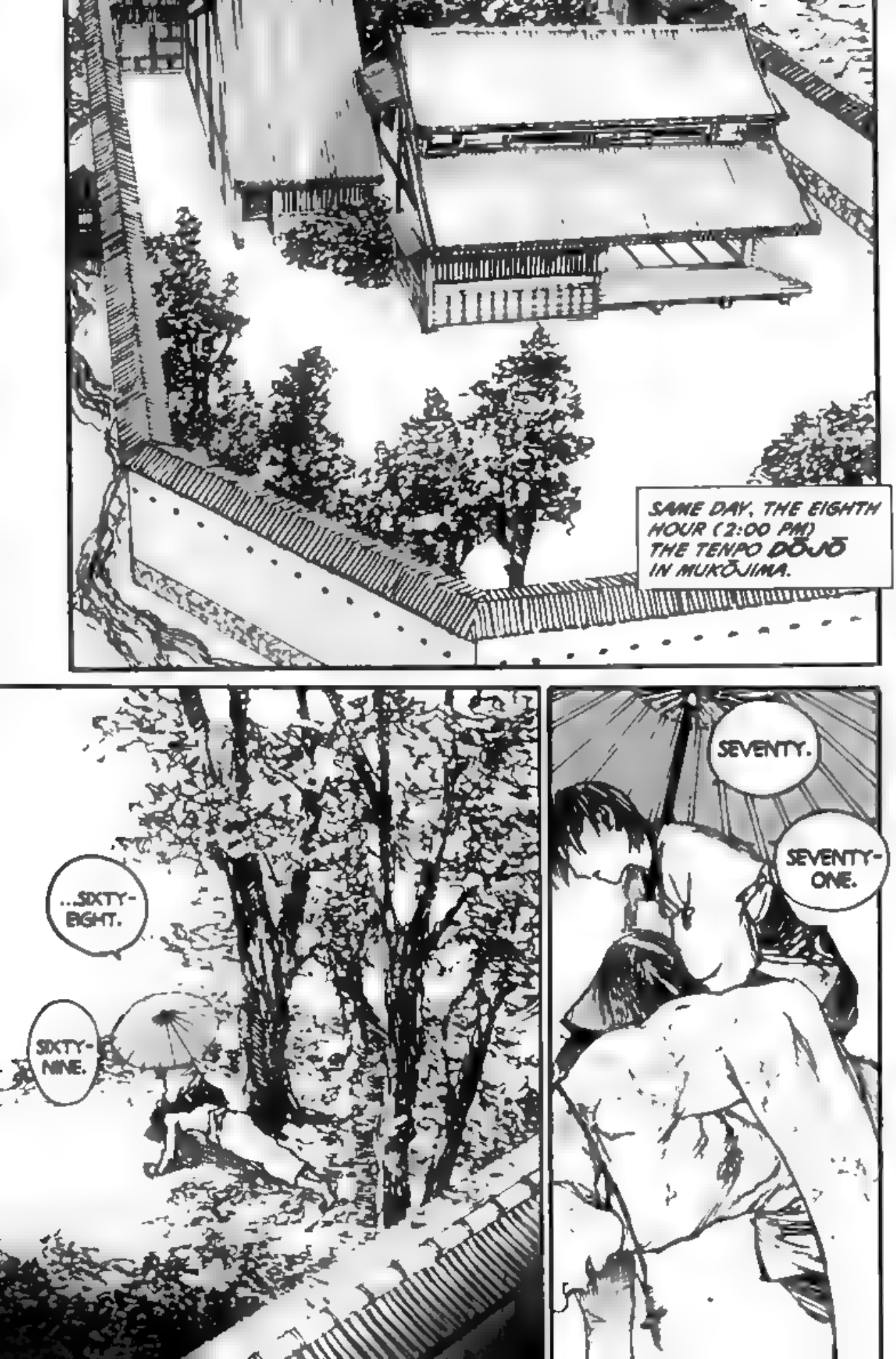
THAT WAS WHEN YOU HAD HANDS!
FRANKLY, WE DON'T EXPECT MUCH FROM YOU.

THE ONLY REASON WE HARBOR A WRECK LIKE YOU, IS BECAUSE HABAKI-DONO SAID TO.
EVEN A MAD DOG, A CORNERED RAT, IF PUSHED...
...HAS CRAZY STRENGTH. OR SO SAYS HE.
BUT, IF YOU QUERY ME...
...I'D SAY IT'S BETTER FOR THE WORLD...
...IF A LOATHE-SOME FREAK GETS KILLED BY ITS OWN PREY!
AFTER I... WENT DOWN THE FALLS...
...I... LOST... MY LEFT EYE.
IN IT'S PLACE...
...THERE'S A NEW WEAPON...
A WEAPON...?!
CAN'T... TELL YOU.
HOH! ONE CAN HARDLY WAIT!
BUT, AS FOR NOW...

...HAVE YOU CHOSEN?
THOSE "HANDS" I BROUGHT YOU?
.....
.....
A SINGLE MAN...
IT AIN'T EASY... BEING HANDS.
EVEN FOR ONE GUY.
FEEDING...
...CLEANING WEAPONS...
...AND SHIT.
NOT TO MENTION...
...KEEPIN' THAT PART HAPPY.

I TRIED THAT OUT...
...FOR ALL O' LAST NIGHT.
SKSSH
THIS MORNING...I DECIDED.
...?!

THE NO CROAKED.
BUT THE BOY'S STILL BREATHIN'...
FROM NOW ON, HE'S MY HANDS.

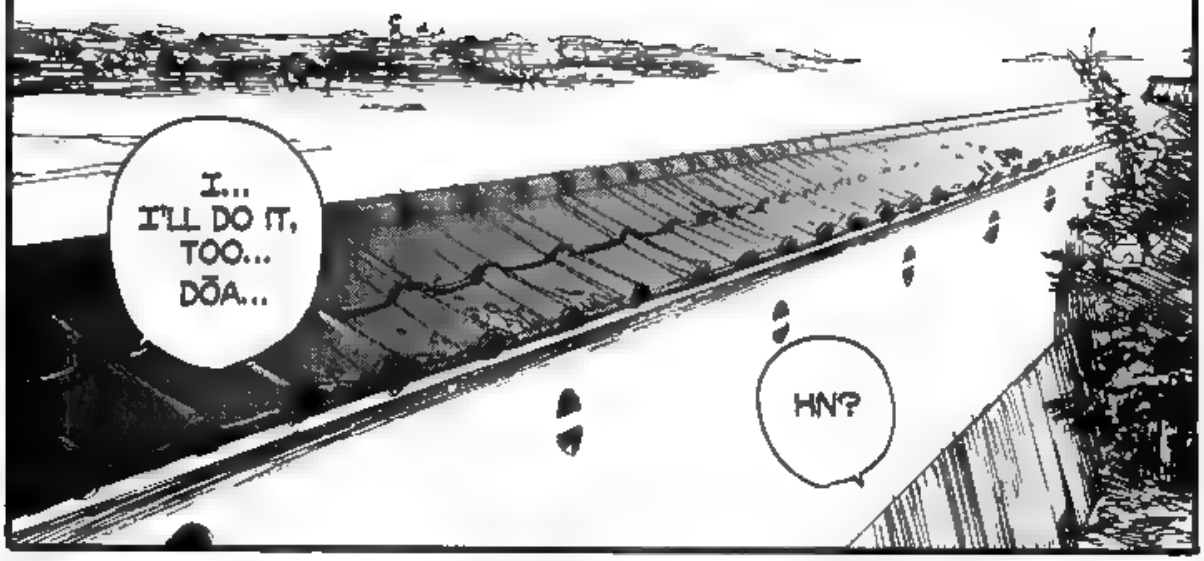

SAME DAY. THE EIGHTH HOUR (2:00 PM) THE TENPO DŌJŌ IN MUKŌJIMA.
...SIXTY-EIGHT.
SIXTY-NINE.
SEVENTY.
SEVENTY-ONE.

ISAKU.
DŌA.
HARD WORK ON A RAINY DAY.
OH! TŌSHU?!
HOW IS YOUR HEALTH...?!
HOW LONG SINCE YOU CAME TO THE ITTŌ-RYŪ?
THREE MONTHS ALREADY?

YOU'RE FIRST DEPLOYMENT, AND IT TURNS OUT LIKE THIS.
ARE YOU AFRAID?
NO. NOT AT ALL.
THOUGH...
...I WON'T BLAME YOU IF YOU CHOOSE TO RUN.
TŌSHU.
DO YOU RECALL THREE MONTHS AGO, WHEN WE MET?

TRAVELING WITH ISAKU... THIS GIRL. HUMAN TRASH...
...CASUALLY HURTING ANYONE IN HER PATH?
BY MEETING YOU, KNOCKING ON THIS GATE...
...I'VE LEARNED SO MUCH.
VIOLENCE, WHEN YOUR HEART HAS A PLACE... OR DOES NOT.
SUCH REASSURANCE.
YOUR WORDS, YOUR IDEALS.
THIS LAND MAY BE TOO PEACEFUL FOR SUCH DREAMS...
...BUT IN FIFTY, A HUNDRED YEARS...
...I KNOW IT WILL CHANGE PEOPLES' HEARTS. UNTIL THAT TIME...
...I THINK I'LL OFFER MY LIFE TO KEEPING OUR PLACE ALIVE.

THE BATTLE WILL BE LONG.
WE MUST *RESIST*. *FIGHT*. UNTIL THE *BAKUFU* AGAIN UNDERSTANDS THE NEED FOR TRUE MILITARY POWER.
I HAVE NO IDEA HOW MANY OF US WILL BE LEFT WHEN WE REACH OUR GOAL.
BUT WHEN CORNERED OR TRAPPED, *REMEMBER*...
...DON'T RESPECT *DEATH*. CHOOSE *LIFE*, EVEN IF YOU FLEE.
PROMISE ME THAT.
...YES, SIR.


I... I'LL DO IT, TOO... DŌA...
HN?

I... I DON'T...
I DON'T WANT MY DŌA GETTIN' HER HANDS TOO DIRTY.

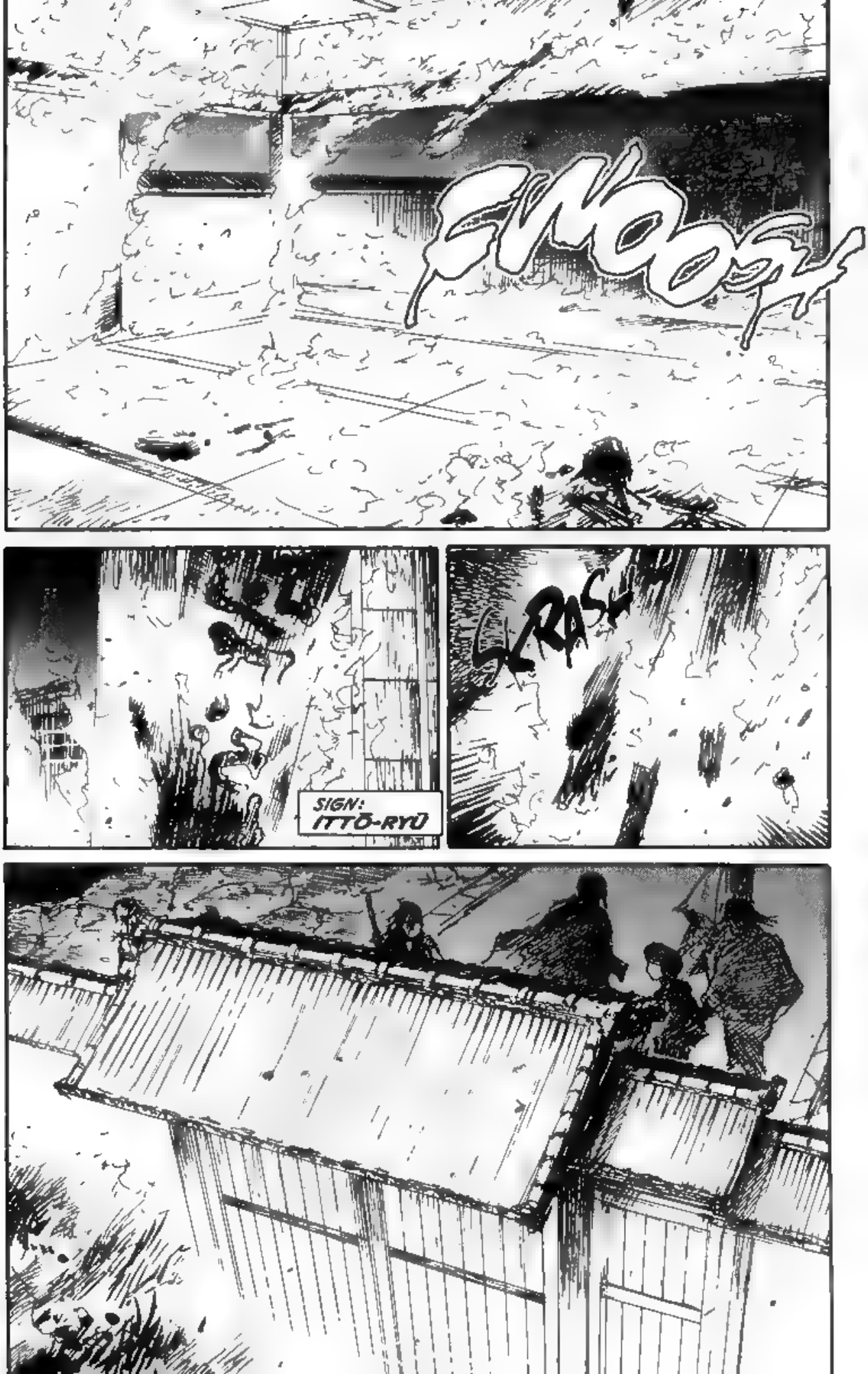
SEE, FROM NOW ON...
...WE GONNA HAVE TO *FIGHT*. MORE AN' MORE.

SO NOW ON, *I'LL* DO IT.
IF I... I GONNA PROTECT MY TR- TREASURE... I CAN'T JUST *TALK*...

IT'S OKAY.
...THAT'S BEEN MY JOB.
SINCE THE NIGHT I GOT FIVE IN OTARU...
WE HAVE OUR GODS ON OUR SIDE.
I WON'T LOSE, ISAKU.

DUET

YOU'RE OKAY WITH THIS, KAGEHISA?
IT'S TIME, NOW...
I AM.
NO DISTRACTIONS.
...FOR US TO RETURN TO OUR ROOTS.
JUST GOOD COMRADES, MY OWN SKILL, AND NOTHING TO LOSE.
LOOKING BACK, ALL WE REALLY HAD WAS AN IDEAL.
THAT'S ALL IT WAS, OUR ITTŌ-RYŪ.

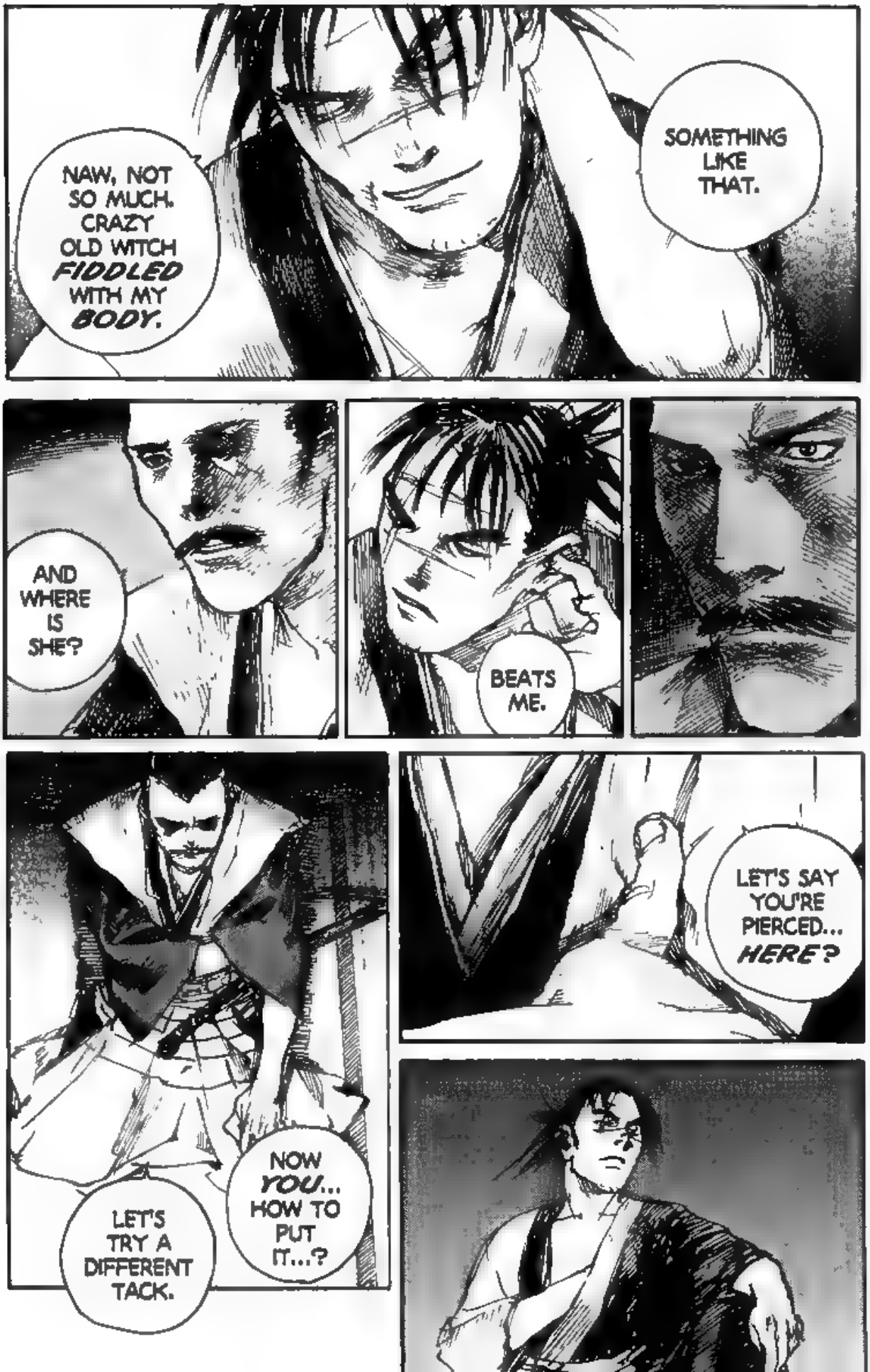

SWOOSH
CRASH
SIGN:
ITTŌ-RYŪ

FROM HERE ON OUT, WE COVER OUR TRACKS. GO *UNDER-GROUND.*
WE *RISE* IN THE *WINTER.*
UNTIL THEN, *ALL* OF YOU... BE WELL.

TAK
AFRAID OF SOMEONE SEEING YOU WITH A CRIMINAL?
WHAT KINDA JOINT YOU RUNNING HERE?
WHAT IS THIS CRAP? YOU INVITE A DUDE OVER AND YOU'RE NOT EVEN SERVING TEA?
HALF PAST THE FOURTH HOUR (11:00 AM). THE COMPOUND OF HABAKI KASIMURA.
DON'T PUSH IT, YOUNG MAN.

THE HUNDRED YOU KILLED...
...INCLUDED NINE OF MY MEN.
...NO SHIT?
SORRY 'BOUT THAT. SO, LIKE...
...YOU CALLED ME HERE TO BITCH?
NO. NOT THAT.
I SUMMONED YOU TO CONFIRM TWO OR THREE THINGS.
I HEAR THAT YOU'RE...

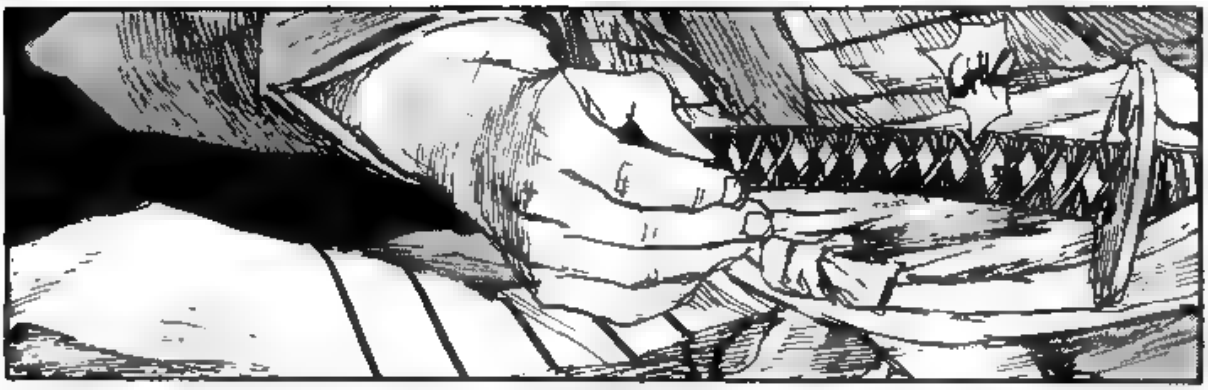
RUMOR HAS IT.
...IMMORTAL.
WAS THAT...
..BY BIRTH?
HELL AIN'T NO ONE LIKE THAT.
THEN... YOU RECALL HOW AND WHEN YOU BECAME...
..IMMORTAL?


NAW, NOT SO MUCH. CRAZY OLD WITCH *FIDDLED* WITH MY *BODY*.
SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
AND WHERE IS SHE?
BEATS ME.
LET'S SAY YOU'RE PIERCED... *HERE*?
LET'S TRY A DIFFERENT TACK.
NOW *YOU*... HOW TO PUT IT...?

THERE? ALL THE FUCKING TIME!
AH! I SEE!
IN THAT CASE, YOUR IMMORTALITY IS PERFECT.
NOPE.
SORRY, PAL, BUT IT AIN'T SO SWEET.
THERE ARE WAYS TO KILL ME. WAYS FOR ME TO DIE.
LOTS.
FOR EXAMPLE?
YOU THINK I'LL TELL YOU, GOAT-FACE?!
IF YOU REALLY WANNA KNOW...

...YOU COULD TRY IT NOW. I'M DOWN WITH THAT.
LIKE, YOU'RE STRONG, RIGHT?
YOU GOT BALDY CRAWLING AROUND FOR YOU.
DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE AFTER...
...BUT I SORTA COUNTED ON A FIGHT WHEN I CAME THROUGH THE GATE.
WELL, GENERAL?
WE CAN SIT ON OUR BUTTS ALL DAY BLABBING, OR--

SHOGUN
THUK



AH...
AIAN?!

IGHT!

HOLD!
HOLD!
HOLD!!
HOLD.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYIN AT--?
WHAT THE--?
YOU... FUCK!

MANJI! HEAR ME!
I HAVE NO WISH TO FIGHT YOU!
MY WORD!
UNTIL YOUR WOUND CLOSES, I SHALL NOT MOVE!
KOFF!
KOFF!
YOU... FRIGGIN...!
GOH!

:Rofl!:
:Wiofl!:
UHNGG!
:ptoh!:
GOOD GOD...
ONE COULD KILL A HUNDRED--
I'M TELLIN' YA, ASSHOLE... I WHACKED MY HUNDRED... IN MY OLD BODY.
AN' ANOTHER THING...
...NOT DYING WHEN YOU'RE HACKED...
...DOESN'T MAKE IT... FUN!
ESPE-CIALLY CHEST HITS. NOW THIS IS PAIN!
WANNA TRY IT?!
NO. I SEE. RELAX.

.....
.....
THAT WAS BAD OF ME.
ACTUALLY, I SUPPOSE I SHOULD CONFESS. FROM THE START, JUST AS YOU INTENDED TO TEST MY SWORD... I INTENDED TO EXPLORE YOUR IMMORTALITY.
OBSERVE THE ROOM WITH THIS IN MIND.
FIRST...

...YOU WERE NOT TAKEN TO THE GUEST ROOM. IT'S BAD LUCK TO BLOODY THE TOKONO-MA.
I REPLACED THE SLIDING DOORS BEHIND YOU WITH PAPER SCREENS. IT'S ANNOYING TO SCRAPE GORE FROM THE FRAMES.
FURTHER, THE CLOSED DOORS. BLOOD SPATTER IN A GARDEN ATTRACTS ATTENTION.
WELL, SCREW ME...
SO MANY WAYS TO KEEP MY BLOOD OFF YOUR PRECIOUS HOUSE. JUST LOVELY.
WORTH THE TROUBLE. TO BE HONEST, AN UNBELIEV-ABLE SIGHT.
EASILY WORTH ONE HUNDRED LIVES.
HABAKI KAGIMURA. BAN-GASHIRA.
CUT THE LAME INTROS. GET ME SOME DAMN TEA!
MY MOUTH TASTES LIKE FRIGGIN' STEEL.

AND SO?! YOU'VE MET THE GUY WITH THE FREAKY BODY.
WHADDAYA WANT HIM TO DO?
HRMM...?
WHAT DO I WANT HIM TO DO?
MM.
NOTHING, REALLY.
AHHN?!
IN TRUTH, NOW THAT I KNOW YOU REALLY ARE IMMORTAL...
...YOUR WORK IS LARGELY DONE.

SHALL I OPEN THE DOORS, SIR?
YES, DO.
THE REEK OF BLOOD IS UNBEAR-ABLE.
SHRRK

AND NOW, MY GUEST.
SHALL WE PROCEED WITH THE FEAST?
EH?!
MANJI WENT... HOME?
THAT HE DID. AN HOUR AGO.
OH... I... I SEE.
I BLEW IT...

HE'S NOT HERE.
BUT... MAYBE IT'S BETTER TO AVOID THIS PLACE?
THE ITTŌ-RYŪ KNOWS ABOUT IT.
SO WHAT NOW?
THE SUN'S SETTING...

MASTER SŌRI'S MOVED, GOD KNOWS *WHERE*...
A SAFE PLACE.
THAT MANJI *KNOWS OF*...
SO BE IT...
MUTENICHI-RYŪ DŌJŌ, RIN'S CHILDHOOD HOME.

YUCK! SO MUCH *DUST.*

COME TO THINK OF IT... IT HAS BEEN *SIX MONTHS.*

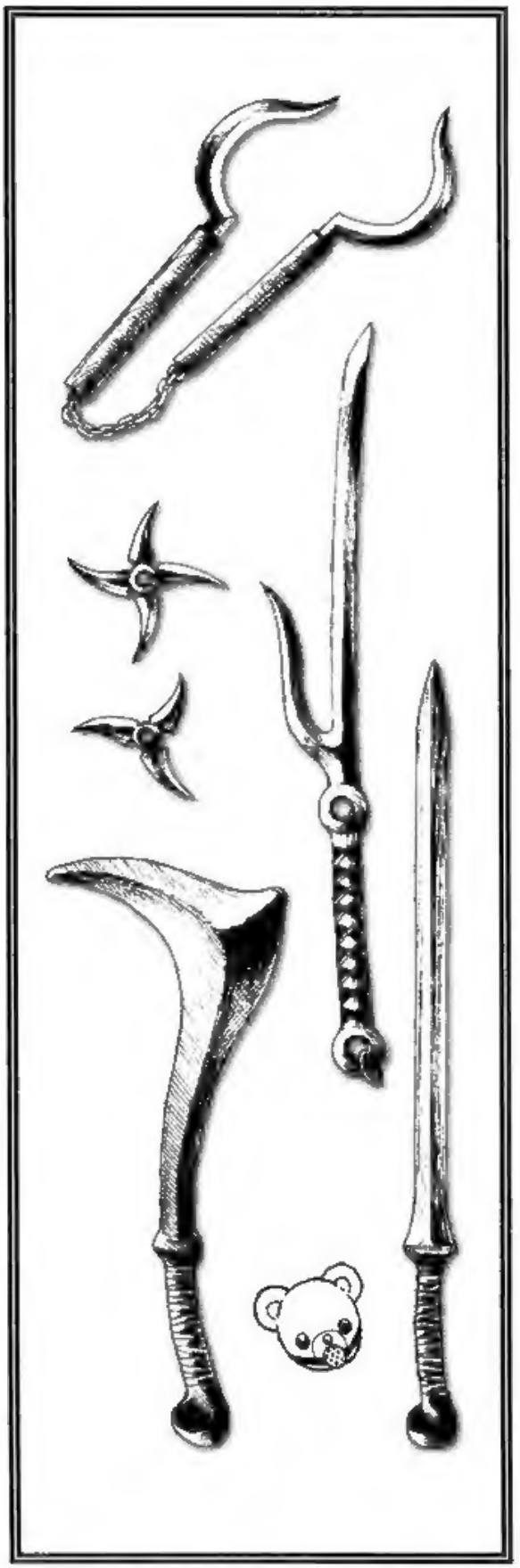
NOTE: I'M SORRY. I'M WAITING AT THE DOJO. -RIN
I LEFT A NOTE. SO IT SHOULD BE OKAY...
...UNLESS SOME ITTŌ-RYŪ THUG READS IT FIRST.
WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, RIN? WEAK-LING.
MANJI.
PLEASE HURRY HOME.

HE'S NOT BACK YET.

BUT...
..I CAN.. FEEL SOMEONE...
S-SEE... THERE WUZ A.. A LIGHT! JUS' NOW...
WHERE, HUH? YOU'RE SEEING THINGS, SCAREDY!

THIS ONE'LL OPEN. TRY THE RAIN SHUTTER.
NNGN! NOPE... LOCKED.
I PASSED BY HERE.
LIKE, WHEN I WENT TO KOJI'S PLACE...?
A DAY'S SCRUBBING, AND IT'S A PERFECT...
I KNOW IT'S EMPTY. NOBODY'S HERE.
...HIDE-OUT?
TO BE CONTINUED...!

GLOSSARY



bakufu: the central government; the bureaucracy that grew up around the Tokugawa shoguns

bangashira: head of the *banshū*

banshū: officers serving under the Shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the Shogun himself

dōjō: a hall for martial arts training; here centers for swordsmanship

doseimotsukō and rengyō: these plants (Dutchman's Pipe and Forsythia) can alleviate some types of poisoning when boiled and consumed

Ezo: the Edo Period term for the northern island of Hokkaido

Gō-Rojū: senior councilors to the Shogun, picked from the most trusted *daimyo* (feudal lords)

Ittō-ryū: the radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa

kessen-chu: mystical bloodworms that can heal all wounds and grant their host virtual immortality

kessen-satsu: "bloodworm killer"; a poison used to counteract the *kessen-chu*

Kita: literally, "north"; nickname for Yoshiwara, the largest and most famous of Edo's pleasure districts

metsuke: a post combining the function of chief of police and head of intelligence

Mugai-ryū: a group of criminals who work as assassins for the Shogunate and earn their freedom by killing assigned targets

Mutenichi-ryū: the sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa

Nakamachi: one of the Shichibasho districts

ryū: a sword school

shamisen: a three-stringed musical instrument, the principle instrument of Kabuki theater

Shichibasho: literally, "The Seven Spots"; the red-light districts in Fukagawa

shō: unit of measurement, approximately 1.80391 liters

Tatsumi: the southeast part of Edo overlapping the modern Fukagawa district, home to the Shichibasho

tokonoma: an alcove for receiving guests, often used to display flower arrangements and works of art

tōshū: leader; master

Yoshichō: red-light district for male prostitutes

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